



# **GROWTH OF NEW TOWNS AND URBAN CENTRES IN MUGHAL BENGAL (1576- 1707)**

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**BY  
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*Dedicated to My Loving  
Parents*

## **STUDENT’S DECLARATION**

I, Ranjit Biswas, student of Department of History (Vidya Bhavana) bearing the registration number VB-2197 of 2019-20 hereby declare that the dissertation entitled ‘Growth of New Towns and Urban Centres in Mughal Bengal (1576-1707)’ is my original work completed under the guidance of Prof. Syed Ejaz Hussain, Professor of History, Visva-Bharati, and this dissertation is submitted in the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in History. The chapters embodied in this dissertation have not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma to the best of my knowledge.

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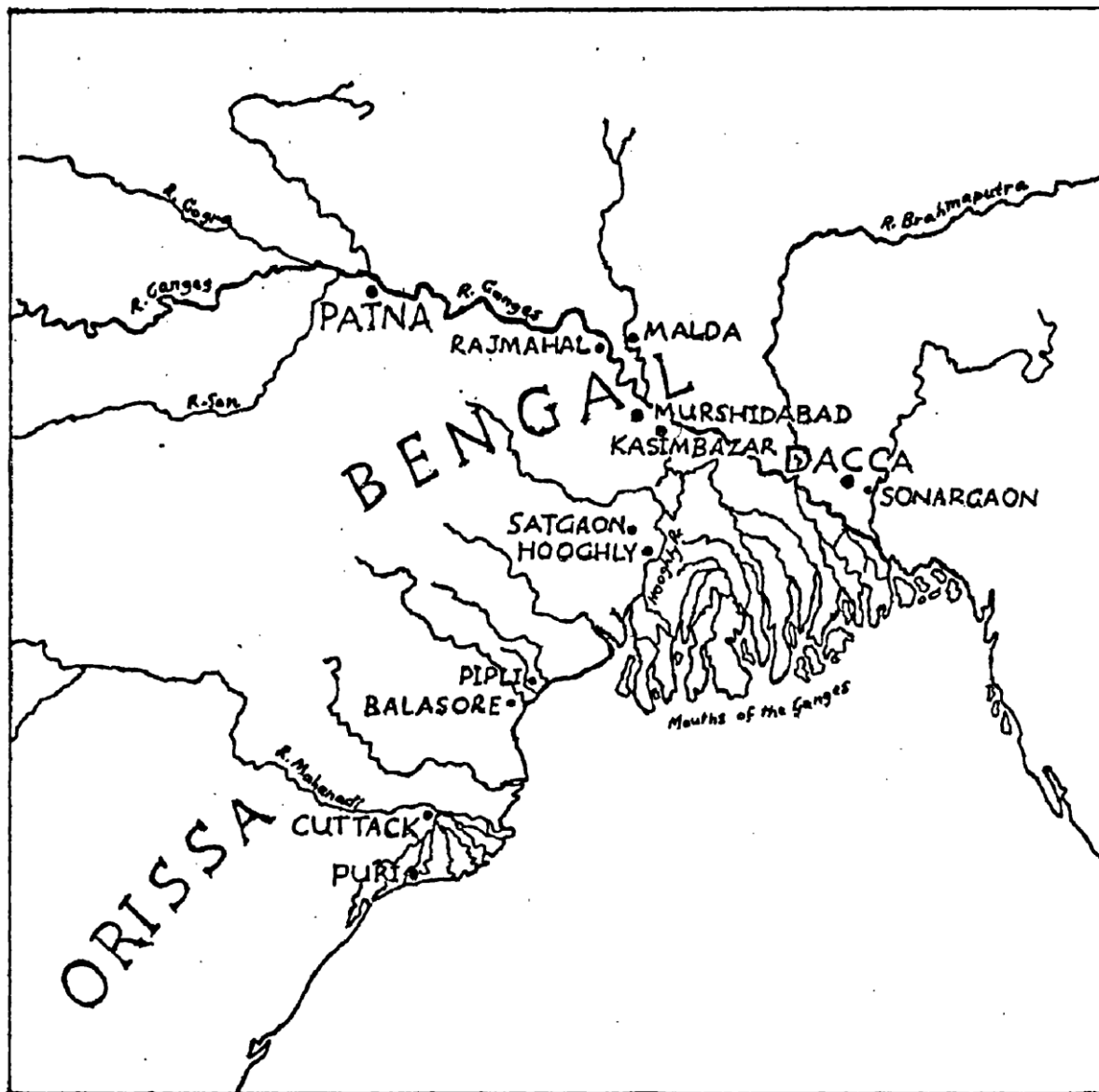
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## **Glossary**

<b>Aus/ Aman/ Boro:</b>	Kind of rice produced session-wise.
<b>Kuthi:</b>	Factory
<b>Bazaar:</b>	Market
<b>Chauk:</b>	Market square
<b>Chowki:</b>	Outpost
<b>Tanksall:</b>	Mint
<b>Haat/Ganj/Mandi/Gola/Katra:</b>	Village market place
<b>Qasba:</b>	Urban centre
<b>Shahr (Persian)/balda (Arabic):</b>	Big town
<b>Karkhana:</b>	Factory
<b>Paikar:</b>	Small village traders

## **Abbreviation**

<b>E.E.I.C:</b>	English East India Company
<b>VOC:</b>	Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie
<b>A.H:</b>	After Hegira
<b>E. F. I</b>	English Factories in India
<b>I.E.S.H.R</b>	Indian Economic and Social History Review
<b>J.E.S.H.O</b>	Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient
<b>J.A.S.B</b>	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal
<b>E.P.W</b>	Economic and Political Weekly
<b>I.H.R</b>	Indian Historical Review



Towns in Mughal Bengal 1650-1720

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## Introduction

The present M. Phil dissertation titled '**Growth of New Towns and Urban Centres in Mughal Bengal (1576-1707)**'. Research on this topic was long overdue because the focus on Bengal was not given by earlier researchers. Professor Muhammed Habib's thesis of 'urban revolution' and 'rural Revolution' in view of the fact that 'the new regime qualitative different from the one it had supplanted and that it released social forces which created an economic organization considerably superior to the one that had existed before' much a generalized argument. Irfan Habib modified this thesis when he claimed that 'what the Sultanate brought about was not a social revolution in any modern sense, but the creation of a new system agrarian exploitation, with a parastatistical urban growth based upon it.' The economic expansion and urban revolution achieved their most developed form during the Mughal period.<sup>1</sup> H.K. Naqvi, on the other hand, surveyed the new urban centres, but she did not undertake to analyse the urbanization process for a fuller understanding of the contemporary social and economic forces and new ideologies behind the decay and growth of urban centres in the medieval period.<sup>2</sup> In view of the complexities of the Indian situation, it is perhaps necessary to look deeply into the micro-level with the help of archaeological findings, inscriptions, numismatics, and geography to understand the process of change. In this context, we try to view the salient aspects of the urban history of Bengal from the coming of the Turks in the early 13th century to the conquest of Bengal, but our main focus has been the Mughal period. Such an examination has been rendered difficult by the total neglect of Bengal sites by the

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<sup>1</sup> Irfan Habib, 'Economic History of the Delhi sultanate - an essay in interpretation', *IHR*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1978, pp. 287-303.

<sup>2</sup> H. K. Naqvi, *Agricultural Industrial And Urban Dynamism Under the Sultans Of Delhi, 1206- 1555*, New Delhi, 1986

Archaeological Survey of India, which has excavated only three sites in Bengal during the last thirty years - that too, partially. These were primarily pre-Muslim sites, a bias noticed by some scholars.<sup>3</sup>

Bengal has had a glorious past since ancient times. It had glorious participation in social, political, and economic spheres. At the time of the Mughal Empire, along with other places of the Indian subcontinent, Bengal also showed rapid growth in various subjects. On the other hand, foreign intervention accelerated the ongoing development of new towns and urban centres. Almost every foreign trade communities set up its factory in this region. There were some reasons of interest in making trade factories. In this context, the various aspects of the process of urbanization along with an examination of commercial and cultural aspects are necessary. For instance, in the case of commercialism, the *maslin* of Dhaka was one of the craziest objects in the world.

Mughal India is an essential subject for investigation in India and abroad. Along with the growth of urban centres, the rise and fall of the Mughal Empire are highlighted in order to have a better understanding of urban growth, especially in Mughal Bengal. One thing that should get noticed is that the development parameters of native states were varied under the different administrators of Mughal. But if we go through the details of Mughal rules in Bengal, while various foreign trading communities formed their trade factories in different places in Bengal, an ample number of new urban centres and cities were taking place in overall economic growth in Mughal India. This present research entails a comprehensive study of the Mughal Bengal in the context of urbanization, and the commercial and cultural milieu related to urban development. In this context, some cities like Chittagong, Sonargaon, Dhaka, Rajmahal, Hooghly, Satgaon, Chinsura,

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<sup>3</sup> R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay In India, C. 300-C. 1000*, New Delhi, 1987. It was first formulated in his book *Indian Feudalism*, Calcutta, 1965.

Chanadannagar, Murshidabad, Kasimbazar, Maldah, Patna, Balasore have been given the focus of attention for understanding Mughal administration power, prosperity, and cultural transformation. The road network, trade routes, the making of *caraval sarais*, stream of men and material suggest the enrichment of this region. Apart from the inland trade routes, the connection with other medieval highways and its connection with the sea routes also provide evidence of prosperity. The rise of overseas trade played a crucial role in the region's economic, political, and cultural sphere. The settlement of foreign merchants in various parts of the province and the development of their trade centres led to the emergence of new towns and urban centres.

Some contemporary writers have referred to Bengal's advantageous location, the comparatively lower cost of water transport, and its agricultural productivity. Adam Smith saw Bengal as an area that was able to support a substantial industry because of an extensive home market based upon inland navigation.<sup>4</sup> Bengal was, in fact, considered to be the nature's storehouse of India, where a resourceful trader could easily amass a great fortune. As remarked by Bernier, the valuable commodities of Bengal attracted foreign merchants, and 'no country' except Bengal where so great a variety of commodities was found. Similar views on the productive capacity of Bengal and its comparative advantage in costs continued to echo during the next few decades.

As Bengal has always been a separate region since the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, finally, in the Mughal period, it came under the central administration. Akbar annexed the province in 1576. What was the reason for this conquest? Was he guided only by the urge to extend the limit of his empire? There is another plausible reason given below which cannot be ignored altogether.

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*. London: J.M. Dent. 1910, p. 21.

The intervention of European Companies accelerated Bengals's trade. There was indeed a phenomenal increase in the Companies trade, both in value and volume, in the course of the period under study. The vast increase in the Companies' export trade from Bengal indicates that it was reasonably successful in overcoming the difficulties connected with the structure and organisation of its trade in that region. The Paradise of Nations<sup>5</sup> - thus Aurangzeb was said to have styled Bengal. No official farman, parwana, or other official papers of the Mughal Empire ever mentioned Bengal without adding the Paradise of India. Bengal's wealth in the medieval period was legendary, and the cheapness of wares there was attested by most of the foreign travellers who visited the region in the 17th century.<sup>6</sup>

The present research argues that the terms like *qasba*, *balda*, *shahr* and *bandar* were in currency to denote the hierarchy of towns, metropolitan cities, and port towns under the Mughals. These terms indicate a clear distinction between the small town and the big town among the minds of medieval chroniclers. *Shahr* (Persian)/*baldah* (Arabic) was used to address a big town. *Bahar-i 'Ajam* mentions *shahr* having lofty buildings with huge pleasure gardens. The capital towns were addressed as *darul-khilafah*. *Bandar* was a port town, while *qasba*, defined by Khwaja Yasin, was a big village by which the pargana is known'.<sup>7</sup> Thus *qasba* was an urban centre; a township with a strong rural-urban interface. A newly established centre generally had an epithet, while 'pur' denoted a *mandi* or a suburb. Thus the connotation of early medieval 'pur' denoting a 'nagar' got

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<sup>5</sup> Ghulam Hosain Salim, *Riyaz-us Salatin*, trans. Maulavi Abdus Salam, Calcutta, The Asiatic Society, 1902, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, (ed., R. C. Temple), Cambridge, Hakluyt Society, 1905, p. 193-94.

<sup>7</sup> Mahmud S. Hasan, *An Eighteenth Century Agrarian Manual: Yasin's Dastur-i Malguzari*, New Delhi: Kitab Bhawan, 2000, p. 249.

transformed in the medieval period, and certain new vocabulary gained currency, so also the nature of the cityscape.

The dissertation has been organized into three chapters. Chapter-1 titles ‘Overseas, Inter-regional, and Local Trade-in Mughal Bengal’. It *begins* with a brief discussion on the geographical position of Mughal Bengal and the urbanization process that already existed during the Bengal Sultanate. It has focused on Bengal’s maritime trade involving the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, and the French. It has covered Bengal’s regional trade, coastal-riverine, and overland. Local trade-based *gola*, *katra*, *ganj*, and *haat* have also been taken into account.

‘Rise of New Urban Centres and Some Major Towns in Mughal Bengal’ is the title of Chapter-2. It first examines the hierarchy of urban settlements like *mauza*, *qasba*, *baldah* and *Shahr*. Ten major towns such as Dhaka, Rajmahal, Chittagong, Malda, Hugli, Chandannagar, Balasore, Chinsura, Kasimbazar and Patna have been selected for thorough research and trace their rise and fall. Where the commercial and strategic importance of these towns were have been discussed. Some of these towns operated mints and produced coins in large numbers. This serves as the witness of their trade dynamism and their total growth as important urban centres, especially during the Mughal period.

The last, i.e., Chapter-3, is ‘Socio-Cultural Transformation’. It is argued here that Bengal maintained the dynamics and characteristics of assimilation and transformation from ancient times. From the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, the delta realized the Person-Islamic culture in every walk of life, both horizontally and vertically. This is well reflected in every aspect of the province's cultural life. The renowned Persian poet Hafiz Shirazi’s ghazal on Bengal was a witness to this when he said:

*Shakkar shikan shewand haman tutiyan-i Hind*

*In qand-i Parsi ke ba-Bangalah me rawad*

[How happy in their sugar-pecking these Indian parrots all,  
Who banquet on this Persian candy transmitted to Bengal?]

This chapter also argues that the process of indigenization of the Perso-Islamic culture also began during this period. During the Mughal period, Bengal witnessed the working of new forces that entirely transformed Bengali life and thought and the influence of which is still felt in the province.

This research ends with a conclusion and a bibliography.

## **Chapter- 1**

### **Overseas, Inter-regional and Local Trade-in Mughal Bengal**

Geographically, Bengal is situated in the eastern part of India. The word Bengal is an anglicized form of the name Banglah or Bangalah which has derived from the word Banga. Banga was initially the name of a few south-eastern districts at the lower courses of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. During the middle of the fourteenth century, the Bengal Sultanate encompassed present-day Bangladesh, West Bengal, Bihar, and some parts of Orissa. Under Sultanate rule, especially from 1352 to 1576, the province witnessed a unique cultural efflorescence, urban development, and growing dynamism in trade and commerce. It has left its impression on the history and culture of the Indian subcontinent. The cheapness of the necessities of life in Bengal was well-known. Ibn Battuta, the Moroccan traveller who visited the province, has mentioned the cheapness of the region. He has compared the prices of several items in Delhi with those of Bengal and gave a clear statement that daily-use items were abundant and cheap there.<sup>8</sup> Fertility of land was certainly one of the chief reasons for this. Bengal's well-distributed rivers and its alluvial land were added advantages for the province. New towns and cities also developed during the period. Recent erudition on the subject by several scholars, including Syed Ejaz Hussain, whose works *Bengal Sultanate: Politics, Economy and Coins* (2003), 'Silver Flow and Horse Supply to Sultanate Bengal with Special Reference to Trans-Himalayan Trade (13th-16th Centuries)' (2013)

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<sup>8</sup> Mahdi Husain (ed. & tr.), *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1976 (2nd Edn., 1st edn. 1953), p. 234.

and ‘Crafts and Economy: Bengal Sultanate’ (2020) have shed enough light on the subject. Hussain says, ‘With the commencement of the sultanate, Bengal entered into a new phase of economic dynamism. Having fertile land and a network of rivers, Bengal was a rich and prosperous country. Agriculture, industry and trade all flourished during the early Muslim rule particularly when the ruling dynasties of Ilyas Shah and Husain Shah ensured peace and political stability. Besides, Bengal maintained a robust currency based on pure silver which catered to the needs of international and long-distance trade, while cowries met the requirement of internal and local trade. Cheap prices and abundance of life-sustaining materials and some luxury materials mesmerized Ibn Batuta, the world-famous traveller who visited the region in 1345-46 CE to call the region *dozakh-i-pur n’imat* i.e. inferno full of gifts’<sup>9</sup> However, M. R. Tarafdar was the first historian who gave enough space to the aspects of the economy in one of the chapters of his seminal work *Husain Shahi Bengal-1494-1538: A Socio-Political Study* (1965). Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s essay ‘Notes on the Sixteenth-Century Bengal Trade’ (1987) gives us some valuable insight on the subject. In recent years John S. Deyell has contributed several research articles and attempted to convince that Bengal maintained a silver currency added with ever-available cowries which sufficiently facilitated medium and lower range of commerce both indigenous and foreign.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Syed Ejaz Hussain, ‘Crafts and Economy: Bengal Sultanate’ in Abdul Momin Chaudhury (ed.), *History of Bangladesh: Sultanate and Mughal Periods (c. 1200-1800 CE)*, Vol. 2, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2020, pp. 141-42.

<sup>10</sup> M. R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal-1494-1538: A Socio-Political Study*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Notes on the Sixteenth-Century Bengal Trade’, *IESHR*, Vol. 24, 1987, PP. 265-89; John S. Deyell, ‘The China Connection: Problems of Silver Supply in Medieval Bengal’ in J.F. Richards (ed.), *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1983; Idem, ‘Cowries and Coins: The Duel Monetary System of the Bengal Sultanate’, *IESHR*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 2010, pp. 63-106; Idem, ‘Monetary and Financial Webs: The Regional and International Influence of Pre-modern Bengali Coinage’ in Rila Mukherjee (ed.), *Pelagic Passageways: The Northern Bay of Bengal before Colonialism*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2011; Idem, ‘Precious Metals, Debasements and Cowrie Shells in the Medieval Indian Monetary Systems, c. 1200-1575’, in John H. Munro (ed.), *Money in the Pre-Industrial World: Bullion, Debasements and Coin Substitutes*, London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012, pp.163-



Agriculture has been considered the principal source of livelihood for the people of India. Most of the regions in the country remained well irrigated with various water channels and their sub-channels providing facility for irrigation. Bengal cultivated and produced many items but rice production was pre-eminence. In fact, rice production was a privilege of the province. Its alluvial and loamy soil and the fertile river basins with sufficient rainfall were well suited for rice production twice a year. Another reason for Bengal's most fertile land was that it lay in the delta that was created by three great rivers-the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna. Adequate rainfall, abundant surface water, underground aquifers, and the prevalence of warm temperature throughout the year made Bengal the ideal region for agricultural growth. Early travelogues and various historical accounts reaffirm to it. For example, Ibn Battuta, who visited Bengal in the middle of the fourteenth century, asserted that 'Bengal is a vast country and abounds in rice'.<sup>11</sup> But by mid fourteenth century rice production was dramatically multiplied. Expansion of agriculture by clearing forests and introduction of Persian wheel for irrigation might have been the main factors for the growth of rice production. Regarding the introduction of Persian wheel Ibn Battuta wrote, 'The way to Bengal and Lakhnauti has through this river [Meghna] to the right as well as to the left there are water wheels, gardens and villages such as those along the banks of the Nile river in Egypt'.<sup>12</sup> There were three methods of sowing paddy-broadcasting, drilling and transplantation from the seed-bed; the last one was popular and convenient to the farmers. There were various kinds of paddy of which *aus*, *aman* and *boro* were well known. Ibn Baṭuṭa says that the price of rice in Bengal was 8 *mounds* for 1 silver Tanka.<sup>13</sup> The price of rice in Bengal was cheaper even during the Mughal period. During the governorship of Shaista Khan (1664-88) the

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<sup>11</sup> *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, op.cit. p. 267.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 271.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

price of rice was almost the same if one could believe the statement of *Riyaz-us Salatin*.<sup>14</sup> The reason for this long-term stability of the price of rice for three centuries was certainly surprising but this shows that the over-all production was still abundant. Francois Bernier who visited Bengal also witnessed the cheapness of rice and other commodities in the province.<sup>15</sup> During the Mughal period new areas were brought under cultivation and this resulted in expansion of cultivation and production. Bengal was also good in producing sugar, opium, turmeric in large volumes especially during the Mughal period. Sericulture was also widely practiced in the province. Sericulture continued to flourish during the Nawabi period too.

It notable that Bengal was major textile producing region during Sultanate-Mughal period. Bengal's clayey soil had the capacity to retain moisture and on account of this it was suitable for cotton production which was an important crop of the province. George Watt's *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of India* that is quoted by Irfan Habib also, says: 'Cotton was formerly grown extensively in the Dacca and Mymensingh districts, in a large tract of land, the soil as well as the physical aspect of which are very well suited to the cultivation of the plant. The cotton raised here, though rather short in staple, was the finest known in the world and formed the material out of which the very delicate and extremely beautiful Dacca muslin was manufactured.'<sup>16</sup> Bengal's textile especially muslin was a product of repute and it had high demand in India and abroad. Ziauddin Barani in *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi* has referred to a variety of cotton fabric called bard which

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<sup>14</sup> Ghulam Husain Salim, *Riyaz-us Salatin, A History of Bengal* (tr. Maulavi Abdus Salam), Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1902, p. 288.

<sup>15</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656-1668* (tr. Archibald Constable), London/Bomaby: Oxford University Press, 1916, p. 437.

<sup>16</sup> George Watt, *A Dictionalry of the Economic Products of India*, Vol. IV, London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1890, p.134; Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)*, New York: Asia Publishing House, 1963, pp. 39-40, f.n.39.

came from Lakhnauti (Bengal).<sup>17</sup> The great Persian poet Amir Khusru has left an interesting reference of the muslin in his poetic work named *Khazain-ul Futuh*. He says, ‘It was so fine and light that a hundred yards of this muslin could be wrapped round the head and one could still see the hair underneath’<sup>18</sup>. Ibn Battuta has also praised the fineness and cheapness of muslin. He says, ‘A price of fine cotton excellent quality, and measuring thirty cubits, was sold in my presence for two dinars.’<sup>19</sup> Of the five varieties of cloth which Muhammad bin Tughlaq sent along with other presents to China, four have been identified with the muslins produced in Bengal. They were named *bayrami* (*bhayram* or *bhayron*), *salahiyya* (or *silahati*), *shirinbaf*, and *shanbaf*.<sup>20</sup> The Chinese ambassadors who came to Bengal during the first half of the fifteenth century have mentioned as much as eight kinds of cotton stuffs produced there.<sup>21</sup> The Italian traveller Varthema; the Portuguese traveler Duarte Barbosa, the Venetian voyager M. Caesar Fredrick, and the British merchant Ralph Fitch have also referred respectively to the manufacture and trade of clothes of Bengal. Abul Fazl has also given a reference to the fabrics of Bengal. He says, ‘The Sarkar of Barbakabad produces a fine cloth called *Gangajal* (Ganges water).’ He further says, ‘The Sarkar of Sonargaon produces a species of muslin very fine and in great quantity.’<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Zia-ud Din Barani, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, ed., Saiyyid Ahmad, W. Nassau Lees and Kabir al-Din, Calcutta, 1860–62, reprint, Aligarh, 2005, pp. 310-11; Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi*, f. 144a; Irfan Habib (ed.), *Economic History of Medieval India, 1200-1500*, Delhi: Longman (Pearson), 2011, p. 90.

<sup>18</sup> Amir Khusrau, *Khazain-ul Futuh*, ed. M. Wahid Mirza, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1953, p. 22; Irfan Habib, op.cit. pp. 90-91.

<sup>19</sup> *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta* p. 235.

<sup>20</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Volume i: c. 1200-c. 1750, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.137.

<sup>21</sup> P.C. Bagchi, ‘Political Relations between Bengal and China’, *Visva-Bharati Annals*, Vol. 1, 1945, pp. 114-15; Haraprasad Ray, *Trade and Diplomacy in India-China Relations: A Study of Bengal during the*

*15th Century*, New Delhi: Radiant Books, 1993, pp. 83- 92.

<sup>22</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari* (tr. and annotated by Jarret & Sarkar), Vol.II, Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949, p. 136.

Bengal maintained a tradition of maritime and overseas trade from very ancient time. Whether it was early medieval period (600-1200) or Sultanate period (1300-1500) or the Mughal period (1600-1800) maritime trade progressively increased and enriched the province. Ranbir Chakravarti has commendably wrote about Bengal trade connections during the early medieval phase. Revised edition of his monograph titled, *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society* (Manohar: 2021, 1<sup>st</sup> edn. 2002) contains two chapters on the delta's maritime trade: 'Maritime Trade and Voyages in Ancient Bengal' (pp. 113-41) and 'Seafaring in the Bengal Coast: The Early Medieval Scenario' (pp. 160-86) which have shed enough light on the maritime trade of Bengal. Chakravarti says, '... Bengal delta in broader terms comes to prominence in the history of seafaring in the Indian Ocean from first century AD onwards....The products involved in the maritime voyages of Bengal were therefore grains, textile products, spices of diverse types and horses. Of these the "Gangetic" muslin, spices and horses must have been extremely precious commodities. The transaction in grain speaks of trade in an essential commodity by seaborne voyages, though the volume of this trade cannot be ascertained. While grains and muslins were exported as local products of Bengal, the horse appears to have been shipped to South-East Asia as an item of transit trade, after the demand for the horse was met in Indian mainland.'<sup>23</sup> Ranbir Chakravarti's two research articles titled '*Maritime Trade in Horse in Early Medieval India: Shipping and Piracy.*' (1989) and '*Horse Trade and Piracy at Tana (Thana, Maharashtra, India): Gleanings from Marco Polo.*' (1991) have well established that in Bengal there was a regular demand for high breed horses which supplied from Arabia and Central Asia through overseas trade.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ranbir Chakravarti, *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2021(1<sup>st</sup> edn. 2002), p.121.

<sup>24</sup> Ranbir Chakravarti, 'Maritime Trade in Horse in Early Medieval India: Shipping and Piracy' in

After the establishment of the Sultanate rule in 1205 Bengal entered into a new phase of political, commercial and socio-cultural change. The thirteenth century was more or less simply a military occupation that was dominated with political turmoil and instability. However, from the fourteenth century the region witnessed the rise of new towns and cities along with an expanding commercial viability and a strong silver based currency system. In this connection, Richard Eaton in his reputed book titled *Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760* (2003) notes, ‘The advent of Indo-Turkish rule fundamentally altered Bengal’s physical and social landscape. In the mid fourteenth century, for example, the visiting Chinese merchant Wang Ta-yüan noted that the agrarian frontier had pushed far into the delta’s hinterland, transforming formerly forested areas into fields of rice paddy. It was under Muslim rule, too, that Bengal’s economy first became thoroughly monetized’.<sup>25</sup> Monetized economy was well integrated into manufacturing stuffs like cotton, silk and sugar and in turn they were integrated with both and local and overseas markets. Eaton remarks, ‘The monetization of Bengal’s economy and its integration with markets throughout the Indian Ocean greatly stimulated the region’s export-manufacturing sector’.<sup>26</sup> Bengnal’s growing trade and manufacture centres have been witnessed by many foreign travellers. Varthema, who was in Gaur between 1503 and 1508, noted: —Fifty ships are laden every year in this place with cotton and silk stuffs. These same stuffs go through all Turkey, through Syria, through Persia, through Arabia Felix, through Ethiopia, and through all India. Later Tome Pires described the export of Bengali textiles to ports in the eastern half of the Indian Ocean.

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Devendra Handa and D.C. Bhattacharyya eds., *Prdci-Prabha*, New Delhi: Harman, 1989, pp. 343-60; Idem, ‘Horse Trade and Piracy at Tana (Thana, Maharashtra, India): Gleanings from Marco Polo’, *JESHO*, vol. 34, 1991, pp.159-82.

<sup>25</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

Some years later, Tome Pires wrote, 'A junk goes from Bengal to Malacca once a year and sometimes twice. Each of these carries from eighty to ninety thousand cruzados worth. They bring fine white cloths, seven kinds of *sinabafos*, three kinds of *chautares*, *beatilhas*, *beirames* and other rich materials. They will bring as many as twenty kinds. They bring steel, very rich bed-canopies, with cut-cloth work in all colours and very beautiful; wall hangings like a tapestry. These people sail four or five ships to Malacca and to Pase every year, and this is still done to a large extent. Bengali cloth fetches as high price in Malacca, because it is merchandise all over the East'.<sup>27</sup>

So far as the growth of urban centres are concerned it is found that new cities and towns some with new names came up during the Sultanate rule. Besides, some old names also continued along with new nomenclature. Rila Mukherjee in her work *Strange Riches: Bengal in the Mercantile Map of South Asia* (2006) notes, '...by the beginning of the fourteenth century the many miens of Bengal, the different names/places/cultures that we mentioned, had coalesced into the three principal areas of Gauda/Pandua-Firuzabad-Lakhnawati (the older Varendra or the political heartland), Saptagram-Hugli-Tribeni (the old Vanga or the cultural and economic pulse) and the Dhaka-Suvarnagram region or the old Samatata. A new name for the eastern region had also emerged-Bangalah. Only the last frontier remained to be subdued, that of Harikela with its difficult terrain, suspect loyalties and the magnificent port of Chattagram at its southern tip; this was only partially achieved by the quasi-independent Mughal subahdar Shaista Khan at the end of the seventeenth century'.<sup>28</sup> Attempts were made by the Bengal Sultans especially under the Ilyas Shahis to capture Kamrup, Kamta, Tirhut and Nepal to the north and the powerful Ganga state of

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<sup>27</sup> Tome Pires, *The Suma oriental of Tome Pires. Vol. I.* Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint. 1967, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Rila Mukherjee, *Strange Riches: Bengal in the Mercantile Map of South Asia*, New Delhi: Foundation Book, 2006, pp. 168-69.

medieval north Orissa to the south as well as Chittagong that was known as Porto Grande by the Portuguese. Except Chittagong their attempts were only partially and temporarily successful. Saptagram, on the other hand, was known as Porto Poquino. The trade radiating from Saptagram is also referred to by the renowned Bengali poet of the period Vipradas at the end of the fifteenth century. Highlighting the mercantile dynamism of Saptagram, Vipradas said that Hindus, Mughals and Pathans peopled it; it contained a dazzling array of houses and conducted trade with Ceylon (Sarandib) and Orissa.<sup>29</sup>

Kararani dynasty, the last ruling house of the Sultanate Bengal came to an end with the defeat of Daud Kararani in the battle of Rajmahal at hands of the army of the Mughal Emperor Akbar in 1576. For some year Bengal again remained as a Mughal military occupation but slowly, the province was fully integrated into the Mughal Empire. Humayun had temporarily occupied Bengal and also struck his coins from there. His silver coins of Bangala mint struck in AH 945/AD1538-39 is now published and well known. But there is a debate and controversy about which city is known as Bangala. Some scholars and numismatists identify Bangala as Gaur. But it may be noted that the Bangala might have been identified as the Western Bengal. When Akbar reorganised the central and provincial administration in 1586, Bengal became a Subah while Bihar appeared as an independent Subah. Munim Khan, Muzaffar Khan and some others were the early Mughal governors of Bengal. But it was from the time of Raja Mansingh, Mughal administration was well consolidated and the Subah became completely integrated into the Mughal Empire.

Regarding the integration of Bengal with northern India, Rila Mukherjee says, 'Now Bengal came to be integrated more closely with northern India through yet another endeavour-

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<sup>29</sup> Aniruddha Ray, 'Middle Bengali Literature: A Source for the Study of Bengal in the Age of Akbar' in Irfan Habib, ed., *Akbar and His India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 229-33.

Sher Shah Sur's efforts-to reorient the trade of Bengal from the east to the west. This meant that Bengal had another outlet for its manufactures apart from its riverine/oceanic trade. The construction of the Grand Trunk Road-which exists to this day ensured that Bengal would no longer remain a marginal Sultanate. The Mughals enhanced the east-west shift. The Grand Trunk Road which was built by Sher Shah (1538-45) and finished by Akbar connected Bengal permanently with Delhi via Allahabad, Benares and Awadh.<sup>30</sup>

### **Bengal's Maritime Trade: The Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and the French**

The maritime trade of Bengal from Akbar to Aurangzeb may be divided into three phases. The Portuguese merchants dominated her coastal and overseas commerce from 1536 to 1632 A.D. This may be categorized as the first phase. From 1632 to 1651 A.D., the period marked the rise and decline of local merchants who carried on continuous maritime trade may be called the second phase. The third phase began in 1651 with the establishment of the English East India Company (EIC) at Hugli. This period, EEIC monopolised its commercial grip in the region and almost ousted local merchants from foreign trade.

### **The Portuguese Trade in Bengal:**

The Portuguese merchants were the first European who established their commercial settlements and independent custom-house at Chittagong and then at Satgaon and Hugli. They attempted to drive away the Arab merchants, the chief carriers of Bengal trade, and forbade them to trade in the province. Joao Coelho was the first Portuguese who reached Chittagong on a ship owned by a Muslim merchant, Gromalle (Ghulam Ali?) Sometime in 1516. Coelho remained in Bengal till 1518, when the first Portuguese fleet of three vessels commanded by D. Joio da Silveira

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<sup>30</sup> Rila Mukherjee, op.cit. p. 170.



arrived there.<sup>31</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his article titled, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade' (1987) has commented, 'Already, by the early sixteenth century, the Bengal region was a major exporter of textiles to many regions in Asia, a distinction it shared with two other parts of India: namely, Coromandel and Gujarat. Bengal was celebrated, however, not merely for its textiles. As the Portuguese were quick to realise, the region was a considerable exporter of grain (particularly rice), as well as other comestibles, which were carried to a diversity of destinations. Bengal was also known for its production and export of sugar, another aspect highlighted in the early Portuguese writings on the region'.<sup>32</sup> The Portuguese rapidly controlled the major part of the shipping and trade radiating from Bengal especially operated from the ports of Chittagong and Satgaon. In this connection J.J.A. Campos notes, 'Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, a great part of the Bengal trade and shipping passed into the hands of the Portuguese.'<sup>33</sup> A third port from where the Portuguese operated was Pipli in Orissa. But by the time Akbar captured Bengal and it rose to prominence as the Mughal subah, the port of Satgaon slowly declined on account of siltation and Hugli emerged as an important port in its place. In this connection, Sanjay Subrahmanyam has said, '...one observes too the shift of most trade from Satgaon to Hugli-which was a few kilometres downriver-on account of the progressive silting of the waterway which served the former port. The shift of the Portuguese settlement to Hughli was legitimised by Akbar's 1579 farman to Pero Tavares, and Hugli had by the late 1580s supplanted Satgaon not only in function but in name-since the Portuguese now term Hughli *porto pequeno de Bengala*'.<sup>34</sup> However, a silver coin of the Mughal Emperor Akbar struck from the port of Satgaon (*Bandar Satgaon*) in AH 982/AD 1574 published by Syed Ejaz Hussain establishes that by the end of the

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<sup>31</sup> J.J.A. Campos, *History of the Portuguese in Bengal*, Calcutta: Butter Worth & Co., 1919, pp. 27-28.

<sup>32</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Notes on the Sixteenth Century Bengal Trade', *IESHR*, Vol. 24, 1987, p. 268.

<sup>33</sup> Campos, p. 112.

<sup>34</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, op.cit, p. 284.

sixteenth century Satgaon well functioned as an important port.<sup>35</sup> Apart from Hugli the Portuguese established their commercial centres at Sripur, Dacca, Noakhali, and Barisal too.

### **The Dutch and Their Trade in Bengal:**

Founded in 1602, the Dutch East India Company also called De Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) formally initiated its trade with Bengal with the foundation its factory at Hariharpur in 1633. The very next year i.e., 1634 the Dutch obtained an official permission from Azam Khan, the then governor of Bengal, to establish factory at Hugli. But due to some problems created by the local officers the Hugli factory was soon closed. In the meantime they made attempts to establish their factory at Pipli, Balsore as well as Kasimbazar and Patna in coming few years. By 1650s, the Dutch opened a factory at Dhaka but they operated their Bengal trade mainly from Kasimbazar. They resumed their trade in Hugli in 1656 and soon shifted their centre of trade from Kasimbazar to Hugli. The principal items the Dutch traders dealt in were saltpetre, opium, raw silk, textiles, slaves and some other items. The Dutch trade provided a new dynamism to Bengal's European and the intra-Asian trade. The Dutch demand for various commodities like textiles, raw silk, opium and saltpetre ultimately helped in flourishing of thier commercial centres like Dhaka, Murshidabad, Malda, Patna and Hugli. World famous muslin of Dhaka, varieties of calicoes and silk of Kasimbazar and Murshidabad, saltpetre, sugar and opium from Bihar supplied by the Dutch to European and other internal markets increased and expanded the bazaar in various parts of undivided Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. On the other hand, the Dutch brought precious metals and some other items to Bengal. This enabled to maintain a robust currency in the province which was an integrated part of the Mughal currency system. The seminal works on the subject like Tapan

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<sup>35</sup> Syed Ejaz Hussain, 'Rise and Decline of Bandar Satgaon: Based on Numismatic Evidence', *PIHC*, vol. 58, 1998, pp. 322-28.

Raychaudhuri's *Jan Company in Coromandel, 1605-1690: A Study in the Interrelations of European Commerce and Traditional Economies* (1962) and Om Prakash's *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1820* (1985) have minutely explored and explained the economic dimension of the Dutch Company's operations in the Bengal region.<sup>36</sup> In this connection, Om Prakash has concluded, 'The companies' trade in Bengal involved an expansion in real income and output in the economy. The additional export demand for commodities such as textiles and raw silk led to an expansion in the output of these goods. The existence of a slack in the economy together with the possibility of an expansion in capacity made an increase in output possible. The high fertility in the agricultural sector of the region also contributed to this process. The precious metals imported by the companies were symptomatic of the rise in output'.<sup>37</sup> By the end of the first half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch and English trading companies completely replaced the dominance of the Portuguese in Bengal's port cities. Richard M. Eaton says, 'Granted permission by Shah Jahan in 1635 to trade in Bengal, the Dutch East India Company opened a trading station at Hughli the following year. In 1650 it ordered 50,000 lbs. of raw silk from Bengali suppliers, and four years later this figure grew to 200,000 lbs. By the end of the seventeenth century, the export of raw silk and cotton textiles had grown so rapidly that Bengal emerged as Europe's single most important supplier of goods in all of Asia. But this manufacturing boom did not result from European stimulus alone. Clear down to the 1760s Asian merchants—especially Gujaratis, Armenians, and Punjabis—bought even more Bengali textiles than did Europeans, and exported them throughout South Asia and the Indian Ocean region'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel, 1605-1690: A Study in the Interrelations of European Commerce and Traditional Economies*, The Hague, 1962; Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985.

<sup>37</sup> Om Prakash, op. cit., p.258.

<sup>38</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier*, p. 203.

**Figure-1**

**Dutch ship visiting Chittagong during the Mughal period in 1702**



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port\\_of\\_Chittagong](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_of_Chittagong)

The Mughal rulers' general policy was to encourage the foreign trading companies and even private merchants from abroad to trade all over the Mughal Empire, including Bengal. In this connection, Om Prakash opines that 'The Mughals regarded an expansion in trade with favour, and the European companies were generally welcome in the empire. Both the Dutch and the English companies were exempted from the payment of transit duties throughout Mughal India. The companies' trade brought in a welcome increase in the imperial revenues from the customs duties. Perhaps an even more important consideration was these companies' import of precious

metals into the empire. The Mughal monetary system depended heavily on imported precious metals, and accretion to the supply of these metals was highly welcome.<sup>39</sup>

### **The English East India Company and Its Trade in Bengal:**

The Dutch trade was followed by the English merchants who made several attempts to gain a firm ground in Bengal through their commercial activities. Sushil Chaudhary did a comprehensive work exclusively on this subject, who did his doctoral work in 1969 on this theme and published it in 1975 with the title, *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal, 1650-1720: With Special Reference to the English East India Company*. English trade virtually started from Hugli which was captured in 1632 by Qasim Khan, the Subahdar who completely defeated and ousted the Portuguese from there and declared it to be the Mughal royal port. The English made several attempts to establish a factory at Hugli but finally they became successful in early 1651 when they established a factory there. Later Hugli remained the centre of their trade. In subsequent years the English expanded their trade and established their factories at Patna, Kasimbazar, Dhaka and Malda also.<sup>40</sup> The EEIC has been the focus of considerable scholarly attention because it first set its ground as a trading agency but slowly it carved its place as a partner in sharing power first in Bengal and then in other provinces and finally it replaced the mighty Mughal Empire. Our purpose is not to go into any detail or any debate relating the politics of the EEIC. What we actually desire to point out here is that due to the growth of the foreign trading agencies like the Dutch, the English, the French, the Danes and some others there developed a new phase of trade and urbanization and as a result of which new townships, new *bazaars* and *ganjs* emerged. Rila

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<sup>39</sup> Om Prakash, opacity.

<sup>40</sup> Sushil Chaudhary, *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal, 1650-1720: With Special Reference to the English East India Company*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1975, pp. 1-26.

Mukherjee has rightly pointed out that ‘There was a new spurt of urbanization along the Bhagirathi belt at the end of the seventeenth century as European companies left Hugli and founded their own settlements. It is to be noted that all these urban clusters were port-settlements giving on to the Bhagirathi, the chief channel of western Bengal. This urbanization was different in nature, for reasons that are spelt out below. These settlements-in order of ascent-were Calcutta (English), Baranagar (a subsidiary Dutch settlement) both on the right bank, Srirampur (Danish) on the left bank, Barrackpur on the right bank, Bankibazar also on the right (Belgians), and then Chandernagar (French), Chinsura or Chunchura (Dutch), Hugli, Bandel (Portuguese) on the right bank leading to the defunct Saptagram. These European settlements, which grew into substantial townships in the eighteenth century, exercised a different relationship with the countryside from the towns....’<sup>41</sup>

### **The French in Bengal Trade:**

Another foreign company of note was the French East India Company. In 1674, the François Martin of the French East India Company established a trading centre at Pondicherry. Later the French were allowed to establish their factory at Chandernagore in Bengal by the end of the seventeenth century. The French were allowed to purchase 61 bighas of land at Chandernagore by Ibrahim Khan, the Nawab of Dacca in 1690. After grant of written permission by the Mughal Emperor in 1693 the French Company became a legal owner of Chandernagore and it was allowed to trade in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The French exported cotton and silk textiles, sugar, indigo and some other items while they imported pepper, cowries, silver, coffee, cloves and cardamom, etc. Very soon the French opened their factories at Kasimbazar, Jougdia, Dacca,

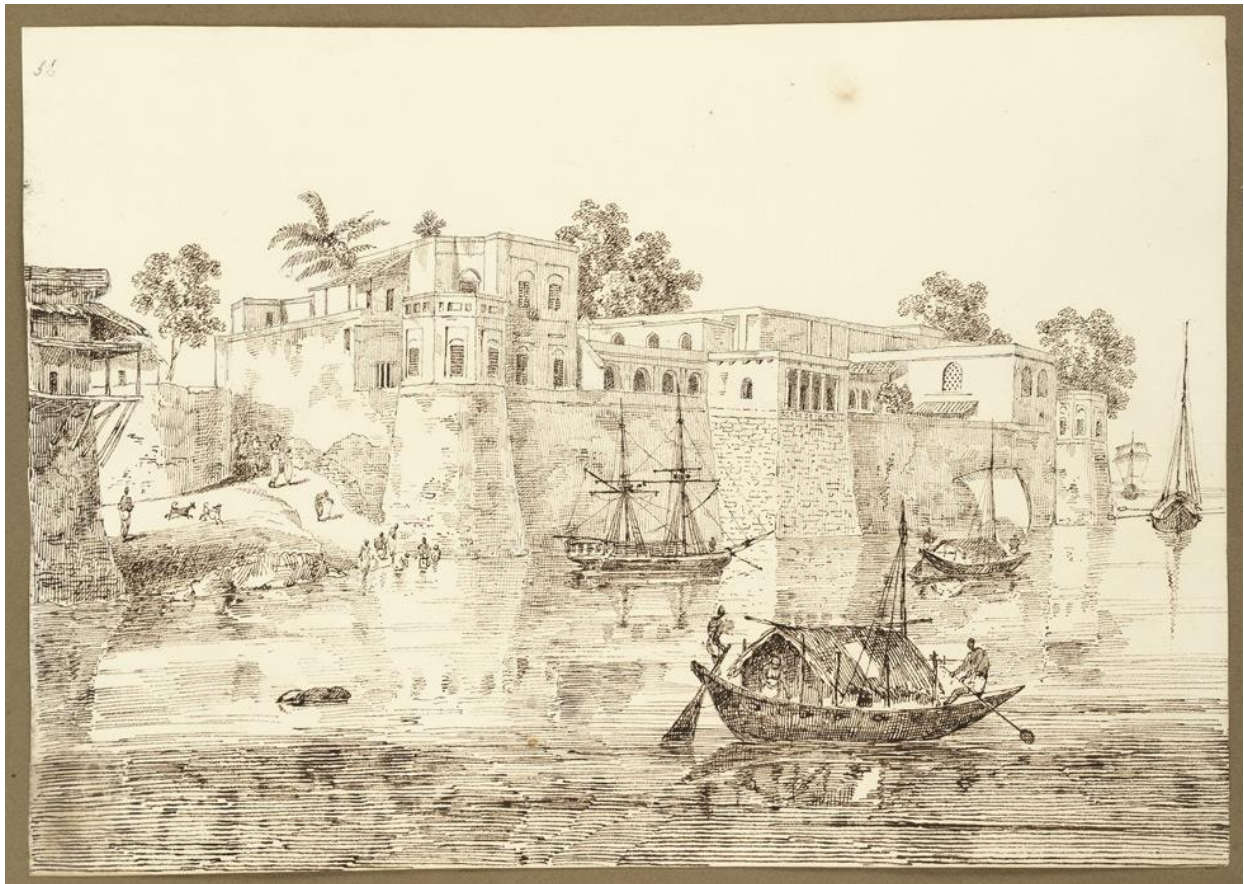
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<sup>41</sup> Rila Mukherjee, op.cit. p. 204.

Balasore and Patna. At Chandernagore their main markets were located at Laxmigunj, Hatkhola, Sabinara, Bagbazar and Khalisani, Bibirhat and Tinbazar. But after 1750s the French trade began to decline.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure-2**

**A view of the French Factory at Patna, 1824**



Source: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/largeimage67227.html>

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<sup>42</sup> Anirudhha Ray, *The Merchant and the Trade: The French in India, 1666-1739* (in 2 vols), New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2004; Rila Mukherjee, 'Life and Trade in the Indian Ocean World from Eighteenth Century Chandernagor', <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/71797137.pdf> accessed On 16.10.2021.

### **Bengal's Regional Trade: Coastal, Riverine and Overland:**

Bengal had a highly developed system of inter-regional trade during the period under review. Her natural boundaries especially networks of rivers connected the cities with village markets such as *haats*, *gunjs* and *mandis*. Bullock carts were the main transport system which local merchants used for transferring the merchandise from *qasbas* to urban *bazaars* and *mandis*. Besides, Bengal was well connected to other regions of India through coastal, riverine and overland trade routes. Bengal maintained overland trade links with the neighbouring regions such as Kamrup, Assam, Tripura, Arakan Tibet, Mithila, Patna and Banaras, Jaunpur, Agra and even Lahore. Its important trading centres like Hugli, Dacca, Murshidabad, Malda, Satgaon, Tanda, Hijili, Sripur, and Sonargaon had well developed riverine and overland links and transport systems. Persian sources, local folklores, traveller's accounts, and many coins found from neighbouring regions like Kamrup, Assam, Tripura, Arakan, Bihar, Orissa, and the present Uttar Pradesh attest to this fact. Food grains like rice and sugar as well as various sorts of cotton and silk textiles formed the chief items of inter-regional trade. However, some luxury items, metal-ware and minor weapons were also included in short and long distanced trade.

The most prominent overland trade route from Bengal to reach Delhi was via Agra-Firozabad-Etawa-Sarai-Shahzada-Allahabad-Banaras-Sahasram-Daudnagar-Patna-Munger-Bhagalpur-Rajmahal-Dampur-Dacca. The river route from Agra to Bengal ran almost parallel to the land route. Ganges provided the main artery of the river route for Bengal. Small and even big boats plied from Agra to Bengal carrying various types of commercial goods. The boats carrying goods from Agra via Yamuna joined Ganga at Allahabad and then reached Bengal via Benaras,



Patna, Munger and Bhagalpur to Rajmahal and further to Kasimbazar through Hugli. Contemporary sources refer to the plying of hundreds of boats between Agra and Bengal. Fray Sebastien Manrique noticed around 2,000 boats in anchor at Rajmahal<sup>43</sup>. In this connection, Tapan Roy Chaudhury, on the basis of the details given by Tavernier, has said, 'The main north Indian water route was of course the Ganges, linking Allahabad to Rajmahal via Benares and Patna. Beyond Rajmahal, the trade goods moved to and from places like Malda, Hugli and Dacca along the numerous tributaries and distributaries of the same river while to the west, the Jumna linked Allahabad to Agra and the distributaries of the Ganges helped maintain commercial links with remoter parts. Between Allahabad and Patna, and particularly in the stretch west of Benares, the Ganges was fully navigable only during part of the year i.e., during and after the monsoons. In winter the boats plied only between Patna and the riverine tracts of Bengal.'<sup>44</sup> On the basis of these facts it may well be said that a high proportion of India's inland trade moved by water.

Bengal was well connected with Malabar Coast and Coromandel. So, it maintained a brisk trade with eastern coast and western coast. Small boats could well ply on the eastern coast throughout the year. On the other hand, on the western coast, big boats could ply between May and September. Merchants from Ahmadabad, Surat, Cambay, Cochin, Goa, Golkunda, Burhanpur, and Balasore reached Chittagong, Satgaon, Hugli, Kasimbazar and other places like Murshidabad, Patna and Dhaka. Rice, sugar, opium, turmeric, textiles both of silk and cotton as well as saltpetre and various other items from various towns from coast of Bengal reached the western coast. In fact the big cities such as Malda, Chittagong, Satgaon, Hugli, Kasimbazar, Murshidabad, Patna

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<sup>43</sup> *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique, 1629-1643*, Vol. II, pp. 134-35.

<sup>44</sup> Tapan Roy Chaudhuri & Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 1 (c. 1200-c. 1750), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, p. 337; Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *The Travels in India*, Vol. 1, (ed., V. Ball), London: Oxford University Press, 1925, pp. 100-102.

and Dhaka served the purpose of administrative headquarters as well as nodal centres where the merchandise reached from hinterlands and from there the merchants of various categories transported the merchandise to the markets located in other regions and then from there to the international markets.

### **Rice Trade:**

In the items of grain-trade rice was the chief commodity sent from Bengal in great quantity to almost all over India. It is well known that Bengal produced rice in huge surplus and it was comparatively cheap also. In this connection, Tapan Roy Chaudhury has remarked, 'A major source of food grains for deficit areas was Bengal. The cheapness of foodstuff in the province was not merely the result of an inadequate supply of specie, as Moreland suggested: the abundance of all varieties of food in this province impressed observers without exception. Bengal rice was sent up the Ganges to Agra via Patna, to Coromandel and round the cape to Kerala and various port towns on the west coast, while Agra secured some supply of wheat as well from the eastern provinces - probably the product of Bihar.... An interesting aspect of the trade-in food grains was the exchange between surplus areas. The relative cheapness explains rice export from Bengal and Orissa to Coromandel. Part of the supply to Masulipatam might have reached southern Coromandel, a deficit area. Bowrey's statement regarding the export of grain from Patna 'to such a plentiful country as Bengala'.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, on the evidence of the Dutch sources, has tried to establish that 'Rice was brought every year in late January or early

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<sup>45</sup> *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 1, p. 330; Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, (ed., R. C. Temple), Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1905, p.26.

February to Masulipatnam and neighbouring ports from Orissa and Bengal, which lay further north along the Indian east coast.<sup>46</sup> Another important aspect relating Bengal rice was that it was very cheap. The cheapness of the Bengal rice was that the European traders, especially the Dutch and, more specifically, the English, also engaged in the overseas trade of rice. In this connection, S. Arasaratnam has discussed in detail about the rice trade in his article titled 'The Rice Trade in Eastern India 1650-1740' (1988).<sup>47</sup> He has noted, 'The Bengal lowlands produced an abundance of rice within easy reach of river and road transport to export ports. Bengal rice had the advantage throughout the seventeenth century of very low cost, thus absorbing the transport cost over a longer distance to consumption areas. The province of Orissa was also a surplus producer of rice along a stretch adjacent to the coast and was, like Bengal, noted for its low prices.'<sup>48</sup>

It is well known that the rice production in Bengal had swelled in the seventeenth century. The main reason for this might have been the wider use of the Persian wheel. Through the surplus production of rice in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the peasants shifted their attention to the production of other cash crops like cotton textile, sugar, and opium. Regarding the surplus production of rice Arasaratnam has informed that 'This surplus rice was exported long distances to remote markets as well as a short distance to neighbouring areas. There was a good deal of trade along the coast a few hundred miles away to densely populated deficit areas. The vast coast between Masulipatnam and Porto Novo had pockets of deficit areas which always imported rice. The northern parts of this coast drew their supplies from north Coromandel, Orissa and Bengal and the southern parts from

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<sup>46</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Rural Industry and Commercial Agriculture in Late Seventeenth-Century South-Eastern India', *Past and Present*, No. 126, February 1990, p. 86.

<sup>47</sup> S. Arasaratnam, 'The Rice Trade in Eastern India 1650-1740', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Special Issue: Asian Studies in Honour of Professor Charles Boxer, 1988, pp. 531-49.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p.533.

Thanjavur. The monsoon regime of this long coastline was such that seldom was there a total failure of monsoon rains along the entire coast. Thus crop failures in one part could be made good by rice supplies from a normal harvest in another.’<sup>49</sup> However, Arasaratnam has focussed on the international trade of rice to Ceylon, Maldives and other countries and the nawabs of Bengal as well as Orissa also took keen interests. Abul Fazl has said, ‘The principal cultivation is rice of which there are numerous kinds. If a single grain of each kind were collected, they would fill a large vase. It is sown and reaped three times a year in the same piece of land with little injury to the crop’.<sup>50</sup> So far as the price of rice is concerned it remained stable for quite a longer period. Ibn Battūta says that the price of rice in Bengal was 8 *maunds* for 1 silver tanka. Quoting Ibn Battūta, Irfan Habib noted, ‘normally, 2 *mans* of unhusked, or 11/4 *mans* of husked rice are said to have sold for one *hashtgānī* in Bengal. At less than 51/2 *jitals* per *man*, husked rice in Bengal was thus substantially cheaper than at Delhi (where it sold at 14 *jitals*).’<sup>51</sup> The price of rice in Bengal was cheaper even during the Mughal period. During the governorship of Shaista Khan (1664-88) the price of rice was almost the same if one could believe the statement of *Riyaz-us Salatin*.<sup>52</sup> Syed Ejaz Hussain has commented that ‘The reason for this long-term stability of rice for three centuries was surprising, but this shows that the over-all production was still abundant.’<sup>53</sup> ‘Comparing the production and sale of rice in Bengal and Egypt Francois Bernier has commented, ‘Egypt has been represented in every age as the finest and most fruitful country in the world, and even our modern writers deny that there is any other land so peculiarly favoured by nature: but the knowledge I have

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, Vol. II (Translated by H. Blochmann & Col. H. s. Jarett), Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1907, p. 134.

<sup>51</sup> *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 1, P. 88.

<sup>52</sup> *Riyaz-us Salatin*, p. 288

<sup>53</sup> Syed Ejaz Hussain, ‘Crafts and Economy: Bengal Sultanate’ in Abdul Momin Chowdhury, ed., *History of Bangladesh Sultanate And Mughal Periods (C. 1200 To 1800 Ce)*, Vol. 2: *Society Economy Culture*, Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, October 2020, p. 145.

acquired of Bengale, during two visits paid to that kingdom, inclines me to believe that the pre-eminence ascribed to Egypt is rather due to Bengale. The latter country produces rice in such abundance that it supplies not only the neighbouring but remote states. It is carried up the Ganges as far as Patna, and exported by sea to Maslipatnam and many other ports on the coast of Koromandel. It is also sent to foreign kingdoms, principally to the island of Ceylon and Maldives.<sup>54</sup> Adam Smith has also recognized Bengal's huge production of rice and other manufactures exported to other regions of India and abroad.<sup>55</sup>

### **Cotton and silk textile Trade:**

Cotton and silk textiles of various types were also formed of coastal, riverine and overland trade, apart from the overseas traffic that is discussed above. It is well known that various parts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were famous for producing and supplying a variety of cotton and silk textiles. Superior quality white calico made of fine cotton was much in demand at various places. In Bengal and Bihar it was known as *Bafta* in Persian and *Ambartees* in Hindustani. Other famous varieties were fine muslin of Bengal called *Khasa* while Chintz was a printed cloth and fabric made with mixing silk yarn. K. N. Chaudhury in his pioneering article titled 'The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' (1974) commented, 'The general picture regarding the location of the cotton handloom industry was clear enough. Within India, a substantial interprovincial trade was developed based on fine textiles supplied from special centres. The muslins from the Dacca district in eastern Bengal had their counterpart in the silk

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<sup>54</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656-1668*, London: Oxford University Press, 1916, p. 437; Syed Ejaz Hussain, op.cit. pp. 145-46.

<sup>55</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed., Edwin Cannan, New York: The Modern Library, 1937 (Rep.), p. 647.

goods and *taffetas* of Kasimbazar, also in Bengal.’<sup>56</sup> The main reason for the growth of muslin textile at Dacca was the availability of good quality of suitable soil, which enabled the production of high quality of raw cotton. K. N. Chaudhury has noted, ‘In the case of Dacca and Kasimbazar an important encouragement to specialization was certainly to be found in their proximity to the supply of suitable raw materials. The quality of the Dacca muslins in our period was in a great measure due to the quality of the raw cotton grown in the area. A highly skilled labour force composed of spinners, weavers, and finishers had grown up around the provincial capital out of the chance discovery that the soil in the surrounding area was capable of growing a particularly fine variety of cotton.’<sup>57</sup> So far as the silk of Kasimbazar is concerned it is known that mulberry plantations were grown in great number in the vicinity of Kasimbazar and that enabled the production of raw silk in high quantity. In 1676, Streynsham Master on his way up the Ganges commented, ‘All the Country, or great part thereof about Cassambazar, is planted or sett with Mullberry trees, the leaves of which are gathered young to feed the worms with and make the silke fine, and therefore the trees are planted every yeare.’<sup>58</sup> In fact, the productivity of agriculture with cheap water transport in Bengal was main advantage for an expanding home market. K. N. Chaudhury has said, ‘Bengal’s locational advantages were attributed by contemporaries both to the lower cost of water transport and the productivity of its agriculture.’<sup>59</sup> Quality of Bengal cotton and silk textiles was not only higher but cheaper in comparison to other areas. This was the reason that Bengal’s merchandise was shipped to Gujarat, Madras and other areas of Coromandel coasts.

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<sup>56</sup> K. N. Chaudhury, ‘The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, *IESHR*, vol. 11, issue 2-3, 1974, p. 133.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 133-34.

<sup>58</sup> R. C. Temple, ed., *The Diaries of Streynsham Master, 1675-1680*, Vol. II, London: John Murray, 1911, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> K. N. Chaudhury, ‘The Structure of Indian Textile Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries’, p. 139.

K. N. Chaudhury has noted, ‘... the quality of Bengal goods was generally higher; than that of textiles exported from Madras and Gujarat.... It is well-known that Bengal exported large quantities of foodstuffs, raw silk, and fine muslins to Surat. The commodities brought back by the ships were tobacco and raw cotton.’<sup>60</sup> But raw cotton was also brought to Bengal from other provinces particularly Surat and Sironj. The main reason for this was that a fine quality of raw cotton called *Kappas* was produced around Dacca but it was not produced in huge quantity.<sup>61</sup>

It is significant to note that Bihar produced a coarse quality cotton textile. Lakhwar, a place some 30 miles south of Patna was famous for production of such type of cotton textile. Often unbleached raw textile was brought to the markets located at Patna where it was purchased by merchants and then sent for bleaching. Some of the big merchants purchased this cotton textile directly from the village and after got bleached sent to the markets at Agra, Lahore and other places. On the basis of the correspondence of Robert Hughes at Patna to Surat of 12 July 1620, in Factory Records Patna the historians have come to the conclusion that Patna calico which was also known as *Ambertee* was produced locally and sent to other regions of India in considerable quantity. In this connection, K. N. Chaudhury, referring Hughes, has commented, ‘The province was well known for its middle quality strong, white cloth, which was woven in the neighbourhood of Patna, the administrative seat, and a town called Lakhwar some 30 miles south. In a series of letters written in 1620, Robert Hughes pointed out that the cloth was daily brought to the latter

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 140.

<sup>61</sup> Samuel Charles Hill, ‘Account of the Fine Cotton, Thread and Fabrics produced in the Dacca Province and of the ability of the Dacca Aurangs in regard to the amount of Goods which can be annually provided at them, Wages and Prices’, *Catalogue of the Home Miscellaneous Series of the India Office Records*, London: India Office, 1927, 456 f, p. 255; K. N. Chaudhury, op.cit., pp. 175-76; K. N. Chaudhury, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p.271.

market by the weavers from the surrounding villages and sold mostly in a raw state. After purchase the buyer delivered the “raw” cloth to the bleachers who took three months to wash and starch it and charged 3 rupees per 20 pieces. The price paid to the weavers for the unbleached cloth was fixed by the current market price of the finished product less a discount of 25 per cent. It is evident from this description that while Lakhwar served as a wholesale centre, Patna had an internal consumption of its own because the cloth which the weavers sold there was already “whited and cured”. Although Hughes assured the Surat Factory that the region was capable of supplying 20,000 pieces of cloth annually, he also made it clear that this would be difficult to organize from Patna. For his own experience told him that what the weavers brought into town was finished cloth for the local bazars only and limited in quantity. Furthermore, the big merchants who arranged to buy cloth directly in the countryside were not prepared to sell it in the local market at the going rates of profits as they could “make a far greater gayne” by exporting it to Agra, Lahore, and other north Indian cities.’<sup>62</sup>

Textile, both cotton and silk, received a boost as they were in great demand from the Mughal *karkhanas*. Abul Fazl has informed about the imperial *toshakhana* or wardrobe. Each item of textile in the royal wardrobe carried a label with the date of entry, price, colour and weight. They were arranged according to the date of their entry into the wardrobe. Apart from Delhi and Agra the *karkhanas* were opened in some other cities like Lahore, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Ahmedabad.<sup>63</sup> Various items were produced in the imperial *karkhanas* and several items were also brought to these *karkhanas* from other provinces including Bengal. The muslin and silk items of

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<sup>62</sup> Robert Hughes at Patna to Surat, 11 November 1620, in *Factory Records Patna*, vol. 1, p. 13; William Foster, *The English Factories in India 1618-1621*, pp. 204-05; K. N. Chaudhury, op. cit., pp. 148-49.

<sup>63</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari* (tr.) Vol I, pp. 87-88.



Bengal were especially most favourable commodities. Agra received large quantities of silk from Bengal. There was also a high demand of Bengal's indigo, sugar and opium in other places. Large quantities of Bengal indigo were sold in Masulipatnam. Saffron from Kashmir was freely available in the markets of Bengal and Bihar. Bengal procured certain varieties of cotton chintz from as far a place as Burhanpur. Bengal also had trade links with Agra, Banaras and various other towns in the north.

Manufacturing of cotton thread and spinning was primarily a family enterprise, mainly undertaken by women, mostly the wives of farmers and women of Brahmin households.<sup>64</sup> Alavi's argument that there was no particular economic advantage in locating the cotton industry in the villages misses the point that much depended on the village's location vis-a-vis the centres of consumption/export.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the rural areas specialised in production, trading, and organising of exports were undertaken by the towns. Consequently, with so many intermediaries involved in the production, transport, and export, there was a jump in urban population too, particularly in Dhaka and Murshidabad and, after 1690, in Calcutta.

As noted above, Bengal had internal trade relations with Masulipatnam and Surat. The goods from Bengal consisted of lac and sugar, which yielded a reasonable margin of profit.<sup>66</sup> Gujarat received lac from Bengal while the Sarkhej indigo, famous for its quality, was taken from Gujarat to all parts of India. Large-scale trade carried on between the towns of Gujarat, Konkan and Malabar. On the Eastern coast of India, Surat had a strong trading connection with

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<sup>64</sup> Biplab Dasgupta, *Trade in Pre-Colonial Bengal, Social Scientist*, Vol. 28, Nos.5-6, May-June 2000, p. 67.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 67.

<sup>66</sup> William Foster, *The English factories in India, 1634-1636: A Calendar of Documents in the India Office, British Museum and Public Record Office*, London: Oxford University Press, 1911, p 178.

Masulipatnam. Through this link, eastern and western Indian goods were brought to Masulipatnam, and the Coromandel and Bengal goods were sent to Surat.<sup>67</sup> Most of the trade from south was along the coast. Large quantities of indigo from Bengal were sold in Masulipatnam. Spices, and pepper of the Malabar Coast were carried to Bijapur, Coromandel, the Konkan coast, and the Gujarat tobacco from Masulipatnam was taken to Bengal. Boats laden with copper, zinc, tin, tobacco, spices, and chintz came from the Coromandel Coast to the coastal towns of Bengal. Coromandel Coast in turn, received copper, mercury, cinnabar, pepper etc., from Gujarat, and spices from Malabar. The coastal towns of Orissa also had links with the Coromandel and Malabar coasts. Cloth, foodstuffs, iron, steel and other metals brought from Vijaynagara and Golconda reached Bengal via Coromandel. The movement of regional trade through the coastal route was most prominent between Sind-Cambay; Gujarat-Malabar; Bengal-Coromandel; and Malabar-Coromandel.

It is also notable that the trade structure of Bengal accommodated a variety of traders who differed from one another in terms of their assets, their functions, their scale of business and also their social and political connections. At one end of this were the small retailers like *phariyas* and *paruchinas* and small rural traders like *paikars*, while at the other end were the great merchants who lived in cities and possessed elaborate procurement networks that often utilized the services of rural trading groups to buy commodities.<sup>68</sup> These merchant magnates dealt on a large scale with equally big buyers from outside the city and, often maintained close relations with the rulers. Not all the merchants discussed in this paper were magnates. There were many smaller city-based

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<sup>67</sup>Ashin Das Gupta and M.N. Pearson (eds.), *India and Indian Ocean (1500-1800)*, Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1987, p.114.

<sup>68</sup>Kumkum Banerjee, Grain Traders and the East India Company: Patna and its Hinterland in the Late Eighteenth Century and the Early Nineteenth Century, *IESHR*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1986, p. 408.

merchants with this general category of substantial, urban merchants (which included some magnate elements too). Saltpetre was the boom commodity of Bengal's and, more specifically, Patna's export trade in the eighteenth century. This trade also proved to be the one that drew political intervention too.

### **Structure of Local Markets: *Gola, Katra, Ganj and Haat***

Structure of local markets of late medieval India has not been studied in any great depth. Structure of local markets consisting of *gola*, *katra*, *ganj* and *haat* denoted the hierarchy of the markets during seventeenth and eighteenth century. The nomenclature of *gola*, *katra*, *ganj* and *haat* carried forward in the nineteenth century and even in the twentieth century especially in North India including Bengal. *Bazaar* is in fact an umbrella term often used for these hieratical components of markets together. In fact, the *bazaar* was a unit for the Mughal economy that produced revenue for the empire. Rila Mukherjee has pointed out that 'Bazaars in Mughal India evolved naturally out of the economic demands of the state; they developed further with the growth of trade and a money economy within South Asia; they flourished due to policies of the regional as well as the Mughal state. We have already referred to the taxes and trade link that the bazaars furnished. Finally the bazaar satisfied the social demands of all strata of the population'.<sup>69</sup> Bazaar was actually an integral part of the Mughal economy.

*Golas* and *katras* were wholesale markets. These wholesale markets were generally established on the strategic points like near a river or crossroads for easy transportation for the dealers and retailers. Besides, each of such markets had its own history. Sudipta Sen in his work

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<sup>69</sup> Rila Mukherjee, op.cit. p. 184.

titled, *Empire of Free Trade The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace* (1998) notes, 'There was no marketplace, large or small, periodic or perennial, and that did not carry a story behind its name, its establishment, or its ruin. As I have indicated before, the markets of Bengal or Banaras were not subject to any abstract state-run jurisdiction; they were certainly not anonymous or generic sites. Their prominence and repute rested on the close patronage of ruling families: Nawabs, Zamindars, and their agents. Principal marketplaces (*ganjs*, *katras*) established by the Nawabs of Bengal or the Rajas of Banaras carried a particular family name or were granted to eminent and faithful courtiers as acknowledgment of their services. In the former seats of Mughal administration and prominent cities such as Dacca, Murshidabad, and Patna, which had been passed on to the Nawabs, the very layout and architecture of the large marketplaces were visible reminders of an imperial realm'.<sup>70</sup>

Sultan Muhammad Shuja, the Mughal prince had built a *katra* at Dacca in 1645. That *katra* was located near the gardens of Lal Bag and the, Sawari Ghat or the Nawab's main quay, between the *chauk* (market square) and the river front. It had a high central gateway and two high octagonal towers looming over the city. This *katra* was maintained by a line of the regional governor.<sup>71</sup> Some of the zamindars and officials of the revenue departments also owned *golas* and *katras* during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Besides, there used to undergo change in the nature and status of the *golas* and *katras* with the change of their ownership. In this connection, Rila Mukherjee says, '*Golas* as mart had their antecedents in the seventeenth century. But the term

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<sup>70</sup> Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, p. 43.

<sup>71</sup> James Taylor, *A Sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca*, Dacca: Military Orphan Press, 1840, pp. 94-95; Sudipta Sen, op.cit. p.44.

*gola* was used for warehouses even earlier. The commercialization of agriculture in the late seventeenth century led to a growing assertiveness of local zaminadars and chiefs. The Bengal nawabs tried to bypass the traditional *haats* (semi-regular markets) established and controlled by the zamindars by putting up *golas* (wholesale markets) such as Bhagwangola in Murshidabad as well as their own *ganjs*. *Ganjs* or regular markets also dotted the agrarian landscape of Bengal now; these were smaller than *golas*'.<sup>72</sup>

The growth of *golas* actually denoted as a striking feature of urbanisation both in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Bengal and elsewhere in North India. *Golas* were also well linked for transportation of rice, other grains and several other items for purchasing in whole-sale. 'Great wholesale markets were established at strategic points along the rivers-such as Bhagwangola on the Ganga near Murshidabad, Narayanganj near Dhaka and Bakarganj on the Padma estuary. These three market towns were the great collecting points for surplus rice throughout the region. By the middle of the eighteenth century the rice supply in Bengal was controlled by Bhagwangola in the west and Bakarganj in the east and it was noted in the Fort William-India House Correspondence of 1754 that Calcutta would be reduced to misery if the rice market at Bakarganj was closed'.<sup>73</sup>

Next in significance for local marketing as well as from revenue and fiscal point of view were *ganjs*. *Ganj* was a permanent market similar to a *gola* but *ganj* was generally a retail market. However, there might have been some small-scale wholesale dealings too in a *ganj*. But it is certain that a *ganj* was smaller than a *gola*. It was during the seventeenth century when one finds the growth of *ganjs* in North India including Bihar and Bengal. 'In the seventeenth century Ibrahim Khan, the Mughal subahdar, established the *bazaar* of Rehmat Ganj. For the eighteenth century

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<sup>72</sup> Rila Mukherjee, op.cit. p. 182.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

there are Burran Ganj established by Jesarat Khan the Naib Nazim, Imam Gunj belonging to the same family, Bazar Kartalab Khan established by Murshid Quli Khan, the first Nawab of Bengal, and Narain Gunj and Lakhi Gunj established by Benur Thakur during Muhammad Reza Khan's tenure.<sup>74</sup> Two market-places named Jafar Ganj and Maqbara Ganj were established by Jafar Ali Khan and Kasim Ali Khan at Murshidabad in 1708. Another famous market Bibi Ganj was established by Najm-ud-Daula in 1749. Many other *ganjs* also sprang up, for instance, Azimganj, Jiaganj, Habibganj Begumganj, Raniganj and several others in Bengal. In Bihar Murtuzaganj, Hakimganj, Hindiganj Begumganj Hajiganj and later Alamganj, Sultanganj, Marufganj and Bakarganj became famous in the eighteenth century.

*Haats* were the semi-regular markets established in villages and qasbas. They were generally managed and controlled by the local zamindars. Rila Mukherjee says that *haats* were of two kinds: zamindari and those owned by the state. She adds, '...Of the former we find Kumira, Kadam Rasul, Udaliya, Bhutpora, Julda, Mekhal, Durung, Jagdish Roy, Garangia, Sam Chowdhury, Karianagar, and Khandokia existing in the eighteenth century. Dates of their foundation are not given but it seems that, in the absence of a strong political presence, local elites took the lead in establishing markets. Obviously Jagdish Roy and Shyam Chowdhury were such local elites. The state *haats* were the *sair haats* situated on lands belonging to the state: Mirganj, Ramram, Oberam (Abhayram), Pukuria and Qutubganj.'<sup>75</sup> However, the state received no rent from these *haats* but levied a duty on goods brought there for sale. Rice, corn, vegetables, sugarcane, gur, oil, milk and many items of daily use were sold in *haats*. 'Manrique, Bowrey, Tieffenthaler and de Gennes de la Chanceliere asserted that the banks of the Bhagirathi and its

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.186.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

tributaries were filled with market-towns. Urbanisation along the Hugli, as also along the Padma-Meghna, was dominated by the great grain marts of the area, held together by a network of smaller *golas* and semi-regular *haats*'.<sup>76</sup>

**Figure-3**

**Women selling goods (1850)**



Source: Victoria & Albert Museum, London

It is interesting to note here that '*haat* was also a charitable institution'. *Haats* were allotted to some of the poor nobles for the purpose of providing them a kind of earning for livelihood or pension. Muhammad Reza Khan granted the revenues of three *haats* near

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.187.

Chattagram in 1759 for the maintenance of the families of Ali Asghar, Syed Rahmatullah and Muhammad Taher. The *sanad* to Ali Asghar stated that: Be it known to the officers and servants of the *sayer mahals* in the vicinity of the town of Islamabad that whereas Sayeed Alea Asgur has represented that he is burdened with a large family and many dependants and that he hath no means of providing for their support...(he) prays that a pension be settled on him by *sunnud* from the produce of the *haut* Meeteemundy to the end that his family be herewith maintained...the sum of one *anna* per diem is accordingly settled on him for his maintenance'.<sup>77</sup>

Finally it may also be noted that the *bazaars* i.e., *golas*, *katras*, *ganjs* and *haats* were established on rent-free lands by grant of a *sanad* or permission from the provincial Subahdars or Nazims. Such a *sanad* or permission was only given to favourites, courtiers, close relatives or important merchants. 'Sometimes the markets were owned by the nawab or held in the name of one of his family. Ownership of these bazaars indicated a certain status, a certain proximity to political power. It was also profitable for it was hereditary. Ownership could be transferred or sold as an asset. Nishatganj, established by Shahamat Jung before 1730 was given to his sister Rabia Begum who in turn presented it to Muzaffar Jung when he married her daughter. Nishatganj, in effect, was treated as part of dowry and Muzaffar Jung renamed it Bairamganj'.<sup>78</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The aforesaid discussion leads to the conclusion that the entire seventeenth century and first half of the eighteenth century may be termed as the most prosperous period in the history of Bengal. It was during this period the trade and commerce at all the three levels i.e. international, regional and local, in the province scaled new heights. This fact is well attested by the travel

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 183.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p. 182.



accounts, Persian and other sources. We have not been able to display much figures for the hypothesis. We have not been able to analyse the numismatic sources for have an impression of the inflow of silver to Bengal during this period and make an assumption of the flow of coins in the market. These aspects may be taken up if working for a doctoral research. But the working of the markets from the city to the village levels was surely well monetized. We have come to know that it was the seventeenth century when the silver coins of even 1/16<sup>th</sup> part called *anna* became an integral part of the Bengal currency. And anna was certainly used for the local and small transactions. The hierarchy of the markets like *gola*, *katra*, *ganj* and *haat* established throughout the province of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa well reflected the dynamism of the *bazaar* and market-structure. Mughal subahdars and later nawabs of Bengal gave patronage and support to the function of the market-structure. Both production centres of cotton and silk textiles, rice, sugar, opium, saltpetre and other items and their supply to the markets located in the big towns were well connected through both waterways and roadways. But the main question in this regard is that why such a booming economy faced a decline after the battle of Plassey. Was there any inherent factor in the market-structure and its function that contributed towards decline or there was the political factors which ultimate doomed over the economy of such a rich province? At least upto the time of Alivardi Khan the economy of Bengal was under control of the Bengal nawab and even after the Maratha incursions, the economy and trade was not greatly disturbed if it was disturbed, it was only temporarily. Maratha invasion caused serious dislocation of the economy in general, but they ‘caused destruction along the line of their march . . . and were obliged to return home on the approach of the rainy season . . .’ The condition of zamindars was not too bad as they, apart from regular revenue, paid 10 million and 5 million rupees to the nawab to meet the emergency military expenditure. Sushil Chaudhury has argued that the commercial life to the province, such as

industry, trade and trading class, export index, investment pattern and credit system, were not seriously affected, and if there was any effect it was temporary and there were ‘really no long-term disastrous effects on the overall economy of Bengal’.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, *Companies, Commerce and Merchants: Bengal in the Pre-Colonial Era*, New York and Delhi: Routledge, 2017, pp. 403–5.

## **Chapter-2**

### **Rise of New Urban Centres and Some Major Towns in Mughal Bengal**

In the previous chapter overseas, inter-regional and local trade of Bengal and has been investigated. The active involvement of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English, the French, and other merchants in Bengal establishes that the province was very much a part of the world economy. Except some minor cases of trifling, the Asian and European merchants cooperated and coordinated in their mercantile pursuits in operating to and from Bengal. The previous chapter also establishes the capacity of expansion and elasticity of Bengal's overseas trade and its growing economy. We have noted that rice was a major crop for staple food. But in the entire Indian subcontinent, Bengal appeared to be the only province where rice was produced beyond the demand of domestic consumption and exported to Maldives and Burma wherefrom cowries were sent to Bengal in returnships. Rice and cowries both catered the needs of the domestic requirement and at the same time, specifically in the case of Bengal, became the goods of international markets. During the Mughal period, the growth of a cotton textile zone as well as a silk textile zone reflected the growth of an overall market system in the region. An important argument in this connection is generally praised by the historians is that after the establishment of the Mughal rule Bengal was not only politically integrated with North India but it was integrated from the point of the market system also to the North India because it was after the Mughal conquest of the province that both its produces and markets were linked and accessed to North India vis-a-vis the Mughal royal

houses. Bengal now well catered the need of not only the royal houses and elite class but even the common men too. In this connection, Richard M. Eaton has commented, 'Even in distant Central Asia fine muslin cloth was called Daka, a consequence of Bengal's political integration with North India, and of its access to markets both there and beyond. The Mughal connection also made Bengal a major producer for the imperial court's voracious appetite for luxury goods. This was especially so in the case of raw silk, whose major centre of production was in and around Cossimbazar in modern Murshidabad District'.<sup>80</sup> A glaring example of this is that Indian merchants from Agra bought up six thousand bales at Kasimbazar in 1655 for export to the imperial court, a quantity twice the size of the Dutch purchase two years later.

A booming economy with three-tier trade at overseas level along with inter-regional and local was certainly the most strong characteristic and parameter for the rise of new cities, towns and urban centres. Other criteria like the growth of pilgrimage centre for *sufi khanqahs*, shrines or temples and the immigration of people of various sorts and categories such as *ulema*, poets, artisans, workers, soldiers and officials is also considered as contributing factors for the rise of urban centres. But growth of trade and settlements of merchants whether permanently or temporarily could be very formidable reason for the emergence, growth and spatial development of a city. Fernand Braudel (1902-85), a well-known French historian and a leader of the Annales School, has classified three basic categorised of towns in per-modern period: 1. Open towns which were similar to hinterland and were primarily based on agrarian structure, for instance the towns of ancient Greece and Rome; 2. Closed towns which were self-sufficient in every sense, for instance, medieval towns which are also categorised as mercantile towns; and 3. Subject towns which were controlled and governed by a prince or state, like, early modern towns of Florence

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<sup>80</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier*, p.202.

which was under subjugation of the Bourbon rulers.<sup>81</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, Henri Pirenne (1862-1935), a prominent Belgian historian who wrote in French, was perhaps one of the pioneering historians who wrote on the theme of urbanization. In his famous work titled *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (1925), he 'imagined cities as places of relative freedom compared to the restrictive servitude and market less settlements of peasants.'<sup>82</sup> So far as medieval Indian history is concerned a debate on urbanization was mooted by Mohammad Habib in 1950s. Mohammad Habib while explaining his theory of 'urban revolution' that is also known as 'theory of liberation' viewed that since the new ruling class, after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, was interested in the craft and skill of the people instead of the caste of the people, the workers and artisans of lower and untouchable castes could now enter the city and enhance the work-force of the urban centres.<sup>83</sup> He said that 'The government of the *Rais* had kept the Indian workers outside the city-walls. When the Turks entered the cities, the Hindu low-caste workers entered along with them. And they came to stay. The new regime wanted the workers, along with their families and their workshops inside the city-walls; their presence was indispensable to the work of the new regime and they had to be at hand. Their services were essential for the government as well as for industrial purposes; without them neither the industry nor the government could function properly. No one now was or could be excluded from the city; our records show all sections of the people living within the city without any sort of discrimination.'<sup>84</sup> This might be a fact for Bengal also, especially after the establishment of the Sultanate rule in the province, whence the social forces became an important factor for the expansion and growth of the cities and urban centres. Irfan Habib in his essay titled 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate: An Essay in Interpretation' (1978) did not accept 'theory of liberation' responsible for the rise of

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<sup>81</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*, ( tran. by Miriam Kochan), New York: Harper & Row, 1973, pp.401-06.

<sup>82</sup> Maryanne Kowaleski, 'Medieval People in Town and Country: New Perspectives from Demography and Bioarchaeology', *Speculum*, Vol. 89, no. 3, July 2014, p. 573; Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946 (4<sup>th</sup> rep.), pp. 217-18.

<sup>83</sup> Mohammad Habib, 'Introduction' in H.M. Elliot and John Dowson (eds.), *History of India as Told by its own Historians*, Vol. II, Aligarh: Cosmopolitan Publishers, 1952, pp.55-57.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p. 55.

urban centres and expansion of towns; he stressed on the introduction of new techniques and technologies as well as immigration of slaves as labour force mainly responsible for the growth of cities. Introduction of spinning wheel, introduction of weaver's treadles, Paper, lime and mortar in construction process, rearing mulberry silk (especially in Bengal in the fifteenth century) and beginning of new crafts, flow of silver in overseas trade etc. were more responsible for the expansion of cities and urban centres.<sup>85</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri in his learned article, 'Some Reflections on the Town and Country in Mughal India' (1978) has roughly categorised the Mughal cities into three groups: Primate Cities, garrison cities and port towns. Lahore, Delhi-Agra, Patna, Burhanpur, and Ahmedabad were the six primate cities which were of political significance. He argued, 'At the height of the Mughal imperial power the main function of these primate cities was political; their strategic or military significance was only secondary.' The other group of cities, according to Chaudhuri, were 'garrison towns, such as Gwalior, Allahabad, Chunar, Aurangabad, and Junnar, which provided the military sinews of the Empire.' But there were other garrison towns also. The third group of cities formed the port towns about which Chaudhuri has remarked, 'Three of the greatest sea ports and commercial cities in India, Surat, Masulipatam, and Hugh, had little political significance and their prosperity lasted long enough to qualify them as economic primate cities.'<sup>86</sup>

So far as Bengal is concerned not much work has been done on the subject of urbanization especially during Sultanate and Mughal period. The most recent work in this connection is of Aniruddha Ray's *Towns and Cities of Medieval India: A Brief Survey* (2017). Ray has given considerable space to the Sultanate and Mughal periods both. In context of Bengal he has traced the growth of the cities like Nadia, Lakhshmanavti, Pandua, Gaur, Satgaon or Saptagram, Nabadwip, and three coastal towns such as Bakla, Jessore and

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<sup>85</sup> Irfan Habib, 'Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate: An Essay in Interpretation', *IHR*, Vol. IV, No. 1, 1978, pp. 289-98.

<sup>86</sup> K. N. Chaudhuri, 'Some Reflections on the Town and Country in Mughal India', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 12, Issue 01, February 1978, pp.84-88.

Sonargaon. Of the Mughal Bengal he has discussed about the emergence of the cities such as Patna, Hughli, Tanda and Rajmahal, Dacca, Qasimbazar-Murshidabad, Burdwan, as well as Chittagong.<sup>87</sup> But main problem with the work of Ray is that he has not given any reference to any of facts and arguments he has harnessed upon. In the text he has referred to some sources but he has not given their details as footnotes or endnotes. He has rather given a bibliography at the end. It appears that his targeted audience was perhaps Undergraduate and postgraduate students.

The present chapter attempts to trace the growth of some major towns and cities in Mughal Bengal in its historical context emphasising the economic factor. Before we discuss about the growth of towns, it will be pertinent to have some specific idea of the growth of *mauza*, *qasba*, *baldah* and *the shahr*.

### **Hierarchy of Urban Settlements: *Mauza*, *Qasba*, *baldah* and *Shahr***

There was a hierarchy of urban settlements during the sultanate period in India. *Muzafaat*, *khittah*, *qasbah*, *iqlim*, *baldah* and *shahr* were the various nomenclatures of urban settlements which denoted the character and size of a market-place also. Such type of nomenclatures were found engraved even on the coins of the Delhi and Bengal Sultans. In this connection, G. S. Farid, an eminent numismatist from Calcutta, in his article titled 'Coins of Iltutmish from Lakhnauti' (1990) has remarked, 'It may be noted that only the Delhi Sultans and their governors issued coins from Lakhnauti from Iltutmish down to Muhammad Tughluq. Ghiyasuddin Balban uses the epithet *khittah* to the mint-name. Ruknuddin Kaikaus used *hazarat*; Shamsuddin used *khittah* and *hazarat* both; Muhammad bin Tughluq preferred *iqlim* and *shahr*. The later Sultans did not use the name Lakhnauti for their mint. Some of them changed the name of the capital Lakhnauti and re-name it either after their own names to perpetuate their own memory or gave other names of their

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<sup>87</sup> Aniruddha Ray, *Towns and Cities of Medieval India: A Brief Survey*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2017, pp. 152-218, pp. 409-516.

preference'.<sup>88</sup> Parmeshwari Lal Gupta and Ajay Mitra Shastri, the editors of the *Numismatic Digest* (1990) in which the aforesaid article of Farid appeared, expressed their opinion in footnote that 'hazarat was invariably used for the capital. The other epithets, most likely, express the various stages of the growth, development of Lakhnauti from a mere village to the status of the capital of the province. In the very beginning, it was called only *muzafaat*; then, with its growth, it was called *khittah*, *qasba* or *iqlim*. When it developed into a town, it came to be called *shahr* and had the status of capital with the epithet *hazarat*'.<sup>89</sup> In fact, *mazafaat*, *khittah*, *qasbah*, *iqlim*, 'arsah and *shahr* indicated various levels and stages of urban settlements. The term *mazafaat* stood for outlying areas or outskirts of a town or city, while *khittah* meant a territory, region, or terrain. *Qasbah*, on the other hand, denoted a small town, and *iqlim* was similar to 'arsah and both implied an administrative division under the Bengal Sultanate. However, an *iqlim* was most probably bigger than an 'arsah.

During Mughal time, the most common nomenclatures used for various categories of settlements were *mauza*, *qasba*, *baldah* and *shahar*. *Mauza* was a rural settlement based on several villages, *qasba*, as noted above, was a small town, *baldah* denoted a periphery or an extended part of an urban settlement while the expression *shahar* was used for a city or a large town. *Qasbas* were the larger units than the rural settlements but smaller than the medium size urban settlements, shahars. *Qasbas* maintained both the rural and urban characteristics. For example, some cultivation was carried out on their outer fringes and these also had some administrative, production and commercial activities within its boundaries. Their size and significance could be increased and decreased according to the changes in economic and political structure. If there were the growth

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<sup>88</sup> G. S. Farid, 'Coins of Iltutmish from Lakhnauti', *Numismatic Digest*, Vol. 14, 1990, p. 45.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



of developed villages due to the developing economy, the addition in a number of *qasbas* was a natural happening and if the trend in the economy remained retarded, the reduction in the size of the township became prominent. The factors that contributed to the rise of *qasbas* in north India, as well as Bengal both in Sultanate and Mughal times, were agricultural and topographical suitability, strategic location, access to external and internal trade, pilgrimage and sufi-centres, and craft-production centre etc. With the increase of population and trade dynamism a *qasbah* gradually developed into a small town or *shahr*. The Arabic and Persian literature as well as other indigenous and secondary sources mention. In this way, various types of nomenclatures were used for the settlements on the basis of their characteristics such as the size, location, function and nature of inhabitants.<sup>90</sup>

The rise of major towns during Sultanate Bengal, as referred to above has been discussed by Aniruddha Ray. But long before Syed Ejaz Hussain in his monograph, *The Bengal Sultanate: Politics, Economy and Coin, AD 1200-1576* (2003) had discussed the emergence of new towns and cities during the pre-Mughal time. Here we will be discussing below the growth of some new towns and urban centres.

## **Dhaka**

Before the rise of Dhaka, Sonargaon was an important city during the Sultanate Bengal. Sonargaon also served as a mint town for an extended period. M.R. Tarafdar rightly pointed out, “What occurred in Bengal in the period from the fourteenth to sixteenth century was the growth of

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<sup>90</sup> H.K. Naqvi, *Agricultural, Industrial and Urban Dynamism Under the Sultans of Delhi*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publication 1986, pp.77-133; H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Term and of useful words occurring in the official documents, relating to the Administration of the government of British India*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publication, 1968, p. 266; M.P. Singh, *Town, Market, Mint and Port in. the Mughal Empire (1556-1707)*, New Delhi: Adam Publication, 1985, p.1.

several towns and ports, a considerable expansion in craft production and also a corresponding expansion in commercial activities.<sup>91</sup> Sonargaon was one such city Sonargaon was famous for manufacturing cotton fabrics and an emporium trade. The manufacturing of cotton fabrics made room for the rise of other occupations such as weaving, embroidery, bleaching, dying, and manufacturing printed fabrics. Alexander I. Tchitcherov argues that the towns like Dacca, Patna, Surat, Ahmedabad, Masulipatam, Sonargaon also had special artisans who were engaged in the bleaching of fabrics where the water of exceptional quality was needed as the *Ain-i Akbari* mentions a unique reservoir in the Sonargaon, with water particularly suited for the bleaching of fabrics.<sup>92</sup> But Sonargaon began to decline after the Mughal conquest of the province, and in its close proximity, Dacca or Dhaka emerged as an important city.

Abdul Karim, in his work, *Dacca: the Mughal capital* (1964), estimated the population of Dhaka as two lakhs in 1640. But this estimation may well be challenged on the basis of the vague demographic tool used by Karim. During the Sultanate period, it might have been a tiny settlement. But it gradually emerged to prominence, and it was established as the capital of Bengal by the Mughals in 1610.<sup>93</sup> Very few cities have such a long time of uninterrupted and organized existence, like Dhaka as a historic city. However, there is no clear unanimousness about the spatial extent of the town, even of the Mughal periods.<sup>94</sup> Different archival sources, historical books, and studies

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<sup>91</sup> Tarafdar, M.R. *Trade, Technology and Society in Medieval Bengal*, International Centre for Bengal Studies, Dhaka: Dhaka University, 1995, p. 65

<sup>92</sup> Alexander I. Tchetcherov, *India's Changing Economic Structure in the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries: Outline History of Crafts and Trade*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1998 (3rd revised edition), p. 71.

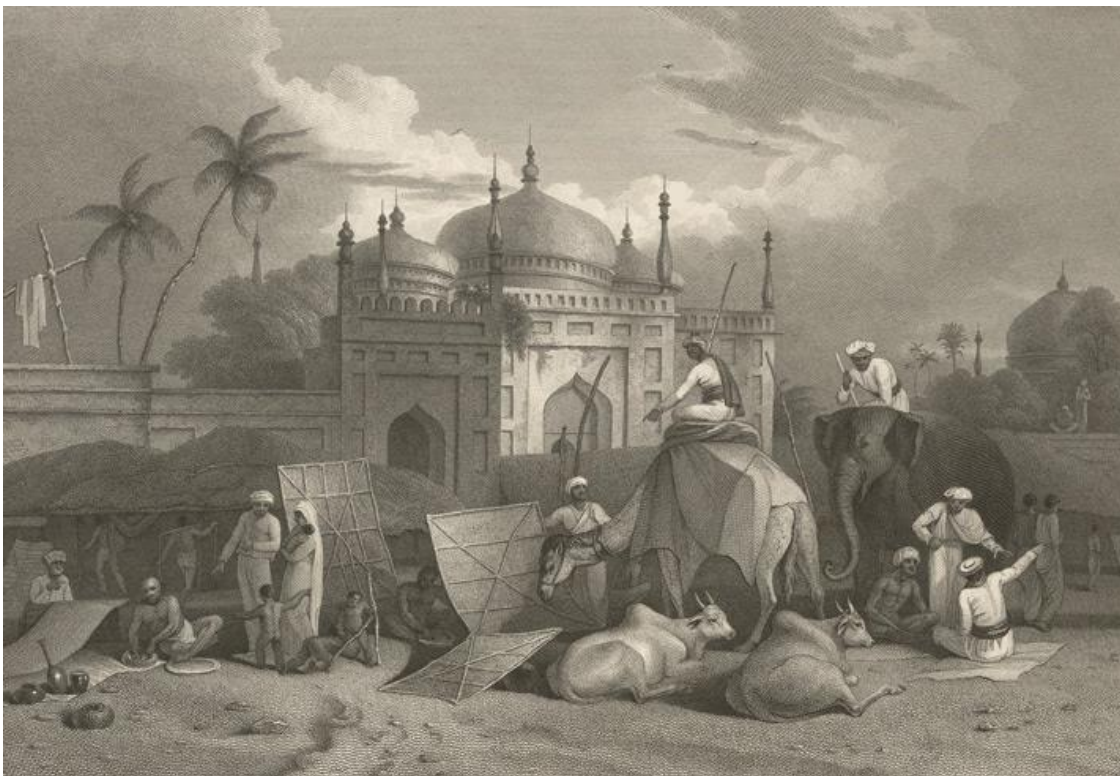
<sup>93</sup> Kamrun Nessa Khondker, *Mughal River Forts in Bangladesh*, A Thesis Submitted to Cardiff University in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Philosophy, 2012, p. 57.

<sup>94</sup> Mashrur Rahman, Kawser Bin Zaman and Roxana Hafiz, , 'Translating text into space for mapping the past territory of a city: a study on spatial development of Dhaka during Mughal period', *City Territory and Architecture*, Vol. 3, Issue. 7, 2016, p. 11.

provided vital information and formed sources for Dhaka's history. One of the most inclusive and extensively documented sources was the seventeenth-century chronicle, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*, written by Mirza Nathan. Mirza Nathan's account carries the details of the campaign of Islam Khan and the foundation of Dhaka as the Mughal capital. In this book, he describes the initial expansion of the town under the Mughals and early establishments.

**Figure-4**

**The Chouk (or Marketplace) and Hussaini Dalan, Dhaka**



Source: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/largeimage67227.html>

James Taylor, in his book, *A Sketch of Topography and Statistics of Dacca* (1840) focuses on the topographical description of Dhaka with its brief general history. It provides essential

information about the earlier Mughal period, especially the area and population. Taylor delineates that almost all the essential Mughal establishments were concentrated in the southern part of the city along the Buriganga.<sup>95</sup> Syed Muhammed Taifoor's *Glimpses of Old Dhaka: A Short Historical Narration of East Bengal and Assam with Special Treatment of Dhaka* (1956) is another significant work on the subject. Taifoor traces Dhaka's historical evolution. Later, Ahmad Hasan Dani contributed *Dacca: A Record of Its Changing Fortune* (1962). The book tries to trace the sequential growth of the city of Dhaka and briefly describes the socio-economic and political factors that influenced its historical development. Finally, Abdul Karim wrote *Dacca: the Mughal Capital* (1964). Karim attempts to a detailed description of the origin and development of Dhaka of the Mughal period. While tracing the origin of names and localities, his argument of using suffixes with the names ending with bagh, tuli, tola, bagicha, pur, bazaar, ganj, khana indicate their Mughal and late-Mughal origin. The locality names also suggest the professionals or artisans who inhabit certain areas.<sup>96</sup> Karim has asserted that the Dhulai River was a branch of the Buriganga River. But it became an abandoned channel over time and was changed into a narrow canal only. During the Mughal period, the city of Dhaka was extended to the north, crossing the old limit of the Dhulai Canal.<sup>97</sup>

Malitola, Uttar Moishundee, Dakshin Moishundee were the localities that came under the settlement in the Mughal period. Further, towards the north, two places named Mahalla Chishtia and Mahalla Shujatpur emerged near Ramna as residential areas of high-class Mughal officials.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> James Taylor, *A sketch of the Topography and Statistics of Dacca*, Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1840.

<sup>96</sup> Abdul Karim, op. cit.

<sup>97</sup> Abdul Karim, op. cit.; Muntasir Mamoon, *Dhaka: Smriti Bismritir Nogori*, Dhaka: Ononna Publication, 1993, pp. 159-61; M. Rahman, et.al. p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> M. Rahman, et.al. p. 8.

Near the Old High Court building, there was an entrance to the Mughal garden, which existed until 1904. Two mosques named Shahbaz Khan Mosque and Musa Khan Mosque were built at that time by the Mughals. All these landmarks identified the limit of the past Ramna area. Considering all these historical sources, the localities existed in the Mughal period.<sup>99</sup>

**Figure-5**

**The '*Chowk*' or marketplace of Dacca**



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=The+%27Chowk%27+or+marketplace+of+Dacca>.

In Mughal times, the native localities were characterized in terms of Mahalla (locality) and the bazaars (marketplaces). The morphological characteristic of the town was such that each locality

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

developed around the market places which still exist today.<sup>100</sup> The markets were local junctions, used as chawks or squares around the road intersections.

So far as the bazaars of Dhaka were concerned, several localities grew there, and a number of bazaars and ganjs emerged. Some such localities in the area of Lalbagh Fort were Rahmatganj, Kansar Mata, Urdu Bazaar, Bakshi Bazaar, Atishkhana, Shaikh Saheb's Bazaar, Qasimnagar, Nawabganj, Chaudhury Bazaar, and Inayat Ganj. Chauk Bazaar also became as an important business centre located near Bara-Katra. It was connected to Sadarghat (a landing platform at the Buriganga Riverbank) by a road running parallel to the river. The market location was in a perfect position to serve both upper- and lower-class residential areas. Qazirbagh and Hazaribagh were developed as the Mughal colonies of the officer while residences or *kuthis* of provincial ministers, dewans, and secretaries were located in Bakshi Bazaar and Dewan Bazaar. Shankhari Bazaar was one of the oldest urban areas in Dhaka. During the late Mughal period, richly decorated brick-built houses also came up.<sup>101</sup> Bangla Bazaar emerged as the main shopping centre during the Mughal period.<sup>102</sup>

## **Rajmahal**

Rajmahal was earlier known as Agmahal. When Raja Man Singh became the Subahdar of Bengal, he declared it to be the capital of Bengal in 1595. Abul Fazl writes, 'On this day [9th November 1595] Akbarnagar was founded. When Rajah Man Singh was in Bengal, he considered about a seat of government which could, to some extent, be safe from an attack by boats. After

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<sup>100</sup> Qazi Azizul Mowla, 'Settlement texture: Study of a Mahalla in Dhaka', *Journal of Urban Design*, Vol. 2, Issue, 3, 1997, pp. 259–75; Farida Nilufer, 'Hidden Morphological Order in an Organic City. *Protibesh*, 2004, Vol. 9, pp. 32-39.

<sup>101</sup> Muntasir Mamoon, op. cit.

<sup>102</sup> Taifoor, op. cit.

much inquiry, a place was found near Akmahal (Rajmahal). Apparently, Sher Khan had approved of it. The foundation was laid in a fortunate hour, and in a short time, there was a choice city to which the glorious name was given'.<sup>103</sup> Akbarnagar served as the capital of Bengal under three other subedars of the imperial province: Qutbuddin Khan Koka (1606-07), Jahangir Quli Khan (1607-08), and Prince Muhammad Shuja (1639-60). Islam Khan shifted the capital to Dhaka in 1612, but Prince Shuja restored the capital to Akbarnagar in 1639. Mir Jumla finally transferred the headquarters to Dhaka in 1660. Thus, Rajmahal functioned as the capital of Bengal for a total of only 37 years, from 1596 to 1612 and from 1639 to 1660.

Raja Manshing called Rajmahal as Akbarnagar also. Presently Rajmahal is located in the Sahebgang district of Jharkhand and constructed a royal palace and several other buildings there. A H. Dani mentions such citadels including Royal palace, Diwan-i Khas, Diwan-i Aam, Machchibhawan, a big lake called 'Anand Sarowar' and several well-decorated apartments which can easily be equated with any other capital city of the Mughals. Prince Shuja's built a splendid palace there. He strengthened the fortifications erected by Man Singh and spent large sums of money in beautifying this great urban centre.<sup>104</sup> Prince Shuja also made a fantastic wooden palace at the cost of 25 lakhs rupees. But the majority of these buildings are now in ruins. The broken wall and the brick laid roads as well as several other remains, confirm the magnificent nature of this city.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Henry Beveridge (translator), *The Akbarnama of Abu-l- Fazl*, vol. 3, Calcutta, 1907, P. 42.

<sup>104</sup> P. C. Roy Choudhury, *Bihar District Gazetteers—Santhal Parganas*, Patna: Secretariat Press, 1965, p.53-54. For Shah Shuja's Palace, at Rajmahal, see *Journals of Francis Buchanan*, ed by Oldham, Patna, Superintendent, Government Printing, 1930, pp. 234-237; Also Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, tr. by Moulavi Abdus Salam, Calcutta, The Asiatic Society, 1902, pp. 213-14.

<sup>105</sup> Charles Stewart, *The History of Bengal*, London, Black Parry and Co., 1971, p .250; Francis Buchanan, *Ibid.*, p. 134; Indra Kumar Choudhary, 'Rajmahal as a City of Medieval Jharkhand: A Historical Review (1595-1765)', *PIHC*, Vol. 75, Platinum Jubilee, 2014, pp. 421-25.

Some Travellers' accounts and some records of the EEIC also attest to the fact that Rajmahal was a magnificent city during the Mughal Period. Abdul Latif, who visited it in 1608, has described different wards of the town and the buildings built by Raja Man Singh, Rana Sagar, Wazir Khan, and Mutamid Khan.<sup>106</sup> Abdul Latif notes, 'As Akbarnagar commands the route to all parts of Bengal, it was frequently the camping ground of the imperial army. Rajah Man Singh made it the governor's seat because it stands on the skirt of the hills and so remains safe from the enemy's hands when at the end of the rainy season, all other places of Bengal are flooded. The enemy with their flotilla (nawwara) can occupy them because it excels behind the rest of Bengal in climate. He built here a fort and mansions. From that time, all people have called it Rajmahal. As the Rajah colonised the place in the 'name of his late Majesty, it is styled Akbarnagar in the official paper'.<sup>107</sup>

European travellers inform us that Rajmahal was not only a capital city, but it was also a great commercial centre. While speaking of the business and trade of Rajmahal, Tavernier claims that this great port city [perhaps on account of its situation on the bank of the river Ganges] was poorly affected because of the change of river course. It again rose to prominence when Prince Shah Shuja made Rajmahal or Akbarnagar his capital during Shah Jahan's reign. In the war of succession following Shah Jahan's death, Shah Shuja was defeated by Aurangzeb's army under Mir Jumla in the battle of Khajwa. Mir Jumla was made Governor of Bengal, and he shifted the capital back to Dhaka once again. Despite these disturbances, Akbarnagar maintained its importance as an important trade centre on account of its well connect through both overland route

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<sup>106</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, 'Travels in Bihar, 1608 A.D.' *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol. V, Pt-4, 1919, pp. 597-603; Mirza Nathan, *Bahistan-i-Ghaybi*, Vol-II. (tr.) M.I. Borah, Govt. of Assam, 1936

<sup>107</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, op.cit.



and riverine route. There was an overland trade route running from Patna to Rajmahal and from Rajmahal to Murshidabad. On the other hand, the Ganga's riverine route from Allahabad via Benaras, Patna, Munger, and Bhagalpur. And further from Rajmahal to Kasimbazar and Dhaka. Rajmahal was thus well connected by waterways too.<sup>108</sup> Sebastien Manrique gives an exciting account of Rajmahal; he says, in this port, we found over two thousand rowing vessels at anchor, which had assembled in connexion with the presence of the Nababo Prince's Court at that place, from all the surrounding districts. With some difficulty, we were able to make our way through the concourse of boats to reach the chautora or custom-house, where all newly arrived vessels had to register themselves. We waited here some time until the turn came for them to visit us. They at once permitted us to enter the city freely. He further notes, 'The city is situated on a bank of the famous Ganges River and extends for about one league along with it. Throughout the whole of this length, it was only with difficulty that we could find a place at which to anchor even one tiny little boat, owing to the enormous number of vessels, and also the great crowd of people, in Ballons and little Dingues, which was threading its way amongst the floating mansions, anchored in due order in this amphiphilic assemblage, in regular streets as it were, thus making an attractive city. This city offered for sale in abundance every kind of merchandise and met within cities on land; among them numerous kinds of saleable goods were conspicuous and all at very low prices...'<sup>109</sup>

In medieval towns, especially those stretched on the bank of rivers, there were maintained chowkis for the collection of tolls. Manrique gives valuable information about the toll-chowkis of Rajmahal. As noted above, Manrique has called these chowkis as Chautoras and there were six

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<sup>108</sup> Khondkar Mahbulbul Karim, *The Provinces of Bihar and Bengal under Shahjahan*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1974, p. 172.

<sup>109</sup> LT. Col. C. Eckford Lucard and Father H. Hosten (tr. & ed.), *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique, 1629-1643*, Vol. II, Oxford: The Hakluyt Society, 1927, p. 135.

Chautoras or custom-posts or registration offices at Rajmahal.<sup>110</sup> Another important aspect of Rajmahal was that there had been a kind of dakchauki or postal services at Rajmahal. Aurangzeb took a special interest in the postal system. Mir Jumla, the governor of Bengal, established dakchawkis from Orissa to Rajmahal in Bengal under imperial orders.<sup>111</sup> The postman from east to west exchanged their dispatches every day about noon. This offered the travellers an opportunity to communicate either way.

Rajmahal was a great centre of trade and commerce. Manuci informs fine cloth production and excellent quality of rice.<sup>112</sup> Rajmahal offered several items of trade and commerce. Saltpetre from Rajmahal formed a part of the investment for Pegu about the middle of the seventeenth century. Saltpetre was a government monopoly.<sup>113</sup> Rajmahal was also famous for a particular type of silk production. The Paharia tribes of the Rajmahal hill reared silkworms and sold them at the local market.<sup>114</sup> In the season of mango-fruit, which is the best of the fruits of Bengal, the Superintendent of mango-supplies was posted in the Chaklah of Akbarnagar, and he, counting the mangoes of the Khas trees, entered them in the accounts, and showed their collection and disposal, and the watchmen and carriers, levying the expenses of carriage from the zamindars, sent the sweet and delicious mangoes from Maldah, Katwa, Husainpnr, Akbarnagar, and other places.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> A. K. M. Farooque, *Roads and Communications in Mughal India*, Delhi: Idrah-i Adabiyat, 1977, p. 140.

<sup>112</sup> Niccolao Manucci, *Storia Do Mogo 1653-1708*, tr.by William Irvine, Vol.II, Calcutta: S. Dey, 1966, Reprint, p.404.

<sup>113</sup> William Foster, ed. "*English Factory Records in India, 1651-54*", p. 11. In Indra Kumar Choudhary, Ibid, p. 424.

<sup>114</sup> Sarat Chandra Roy, *Man in India: A Quarterly Record of Anthropological Science with Special Reference to India*, Vol.13, Ranchi, Editor at the Man in India Office, 1933, p. 161.

<sup>115</sup> Gulam Husain Salim, *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, Op-cit., pp. 281-82.

Rajmahal was also developed as a mint-town. A mint was founded at Akbarnagar sometime in 1596. Coins had been produced regularly from Akbarnagar mint during Jahangir, Shahjahan, and Aurangzeb's reign. During this period, foreign merchants, especially the Dutch and later the English, who were active in commerce at Hugli got their bullion converted into coins at this mint. When John Marshall reached Rajmahal and visited the Akbarnagar mint he notes, '...when went to the Tanksall [tankasala, tahsal, takskal mint] where Rupees are coined. In the way thither happened a blast of wind which had like to have upset my Pallenkeene? I see them make, but not stamp Rupees; but the stamp is broad, being cut in steel, and having the characters on a rupee in 5 places cut upon the rupee (viz.), upon the middle, and round about 4; so the rupee upon the middle and another stamp upon the rupee, and so stamps both sides at once.'<sup>116</sup> Syed Ejaz Hussain, in his recent article titled '*Akbarnagar: A Mughal Mint in Bengal*' (2019), noted, 'In total three gold coins from the Akbarnagar mint are reported. Out of these three, two belong to Akbar, struck by Raja Man Singh in the name of the emperor, and he struck one gold coin in the name of Aurangzeb. The silver coins of Akbarnagar mint are described in the five-coin catalogues mentioned above, a total of 248 pieces, including a ½ rupee and a 2 anna'<sup>117</sup>. However, Rajmahal ceased to be a mint after establishing a mint at Murshidabad by Murshid Quli Khan.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Shafaat Ahmad Khan (ed.), *John Marshal in India-Notes and Observations in Bengal, 1668-1671*, London: Oxford University Press, 1927, p. 117.

<sup>117</sup> Syed Ejaz Hussain, '*Akbarnagar: A Mughal Mint in Bengal*', London: *Oriental Numismatic Society*, No. 328, Winter 2019, pp. 61-64.

<sup>118</sup> Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*, Thesis Submitted for the P.h.d. Degree of the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1962, p. 151.

**Figure-6**

**Coin of Aurangzeb from Akbarnagar Mint.**



Source: <https://en.numista.com/catalogue/pieces57412.html>

## **Chittagong**

As mentioned above the Portuguese called Chittagong as Porto Grande.<sup>119</sup> Chittagong continued to be a port of importance with the Portuguese and Arakanese dominating the eastern part of the Bay of Bengal. It is one of those places. The sea-port of Chittagong attracted traders from all Asiatic countries and Europe, all of whom left a mark of their culture on Chittagong's history.<sup>120</sup> Why Chittagong was economically so significant may well be explained for the reason that this port city enjoyed a privileged location at the apex of the Bay of Bengal, and is ideally situated as an entrepot for the maritime trade of Burma and south-east Asia too. Its anchorage in

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<sup>119</sup> J.J.A. Compos, *History of the Portuguese In Bengal*, Calcutta, Medical Publishers, 1919, p.21.

<sup>120</sup> Syed Murtaza Ali, *History of Chittagong*, Dacca: Standard Publication, Ratan Art Press, 1964, p.1.

the Karnafuli River was well sheltered from the notorious storms of the Bay of Bengal. Its proximity to the mouths of the Brahmaputra, Meghna and Ganga River Systems (separate in the medieval period) gave waterborne access to both east and west Bengal. The hinterland of Chittagong city stretched southwards to include the tracts of Chakaria and Ramu. The Arakan frontier was south of Ramu.

During the Sultanate period, Chittagong was a centre of power axis of Bengal, Arakan and Burma as well as the Portuguese. A considerable portion of the materials for export from East Bengal also found its way in native crafts to Goa, Malacca, and other Portuguese ports in India. Apart from Portuguese European travellers like Barbosa, Nicolo Conti, Caesar Frederic and some others visited this port during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Regarding the city of Chittagong, Joao De Barros wrote in 1532A.D, ‘Chittagong is the most eminent and affluent city of the Bengal Kingdom, on account of its port, which meets the traffic of all that eastern region.’<sup>121</sup> After the establishment of the Portuguese settlement in Hugli, Chittagong had begun to lose its commercial importance. Even then, Eastern Bengal and the kingdom of Arakan continued to have some industries there, and the Portuguese ships used to go to Chittagong with their goods, though Hugli was a more frequent port. In 1567 A.D., Caesar de Frederick found more than eighteen ships anchored in Chittagong. He writes that the traders carried various kinds of stuff to the Indies, great stores of rice, and significant quantities of bombast cloth of every sort, sugar, corn, and money with other merchandise from this port.<sup>122</sup>

Quoting some Persian chronicles, Richard Eaton has remarked, ‘Prior to the Mughal conquest in 1666, Chittagong’s hinterland remained agriculturally undeveloped—a dense, impenetrable

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p.56.

<sup>122</sup> Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumous or Purchase His pilgrimes*, Vol. X, Glasgow,: James MacLehos and Sons, p.138; Syed Murtaza Ali, *History of Chittagong*, op.cit. p.118.

jungle. In 1595 Abul Fazl described the city of Chittagong as ‘belted by woods.’ In 1621, wrote Mirza Nathan, Mughal troops proceeded through the present Chittagong District below the Karnafuli River along “a jungle route which was impassable even for an ant.” And a contemporary chronicler of the 1665–66 Mughal expedition to Chittagong, Shihab al-Din Talish, recorded that before embarking on the expedition, Mughal commanders in Dhaka supplied their troops with thousands of axes, for the army had literally to hack its way through the dense jungle down the Chittagong coast from the Feni to the Karnafuli rivers, an area described by Shihab al-Din as an “utterly desolate wilderness.”<sup>123</sup> But Francis Buchanan, who visited the city in 1798, witnessed the production of rice, cotton, and capsicum, indigo in Chittagong.<sup>124</sup>

In fact, Chittagong had a terrific merchant economy. There is no confusion about the fact that there were regular mint and minted coins. Some of the Bengal Sultans struck coins also from there. The coin catalogues, especially by *The Coins of Indian Sultanates* by Stan Goron and J. P. Goenka (2001), carry some coins issued from Chittagong mint. Not only that we know for certain that some Arakan kings also issued Bengal type coins from Chittagong mint.<sup>125</sup> But much more interesting in this connection are the ‘Trade Coinages’ struck from Chittagong. The Research article published by John Deyell titled, ‘The Trade Coinage of Chittagong Region in the Mid-Sixteenth Century’ (1995) gives interesting information in this connection. These coins were struck in the name of the Afghan rulers like Sher Shah, Islam Shah, Muhammad Adil, Jalal Shah and Bahadur Shah as well as in the name of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, as also in the name of

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<sup>123</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier, 1204-1761*, p. 140.

<sup>124</sup> Francis Buchanan, *An Account of a Journey Undertaken by Order of the Bd. of Trade through the Provinces of Chittagong and Tipperah in Order to Look Out for the Places Most Proper for the Cultivation of Spices*, (Ms., 1798, British Library, London, Add. 19286), pp. 46–47.

<sup>125</sup> Stan Goron and J. P. Goenka, *The Coins of Indian Sultanates*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2001, pp. 181,189,191,193,195,197, 201,203,244.

some Arakan rulers like Adam Humayun, Vamar Shah and Sikandar Shah. These coins do not bear the mint name, but they carry the dates. The earliest date is AH 946, and the latest date A.H 992. All these coins have been discovered in the Chittagong area. John Deyell says, ‘Given the trade context of the period, the best explanation is that the “Chittagong type” coins were a trade coin struck in or near Chittagong from the bullion received in maritime and overland trade from Burma Yunnan and more remote origins. The purpose of the coinage was to convert the raw bullion into a form convenient for trade. The coinage that was struck in the Chittagong region is evident both from the provenance of land and the use of the tanka weight standard. This coin weight was favoured throughout the region from Arakan to Tripura inclusive (Bengal proper and Hindustan during this period used the heavier rupiya standard for silver coins)’.<sup>126</sup> These coins attest to the fact that Chittagong was a centre for extensive trade, and the bankers, money-changers, and sarrafs played their active role in it. Deyell concludes, ‘The operation of coinage mints during this period was largely in the hands of traditional moneyers who were either employed by the government, licensed by the government, or operated independently on their own initiative... the impulse for coinage came from those engaged in intra-regional trade, with their primary focus being Bengal in the first instance and Hindustan in the second. Such an interpretation does not exclude, for example, the Portuguese who were then present in some strength in the Chittagong area’.<sup>127</sup>

When the British, Dutch, and the French gave much importance to the port of Hugli, the value of Chittagong comparatively decreased, but it continued as a contributory port. It was an important shipbuilding centre too. Chittagong was also named Fatehabad in the early Muslim period and renamed Islamabad in the reign of Aurangzeb.

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<sup>126</sup> John Deyell, ‘The Trade Coinage of Chittagong Region In the Mid-Sixteenth Century’, *Journal of The Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Humanities-Vol. 40, No. 2, December 1995, pp. 227-28.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. pp.28-29.

## Malda

W.W. Hunter, a scholar, educationist and editor of the Imperial Gazetteer of India, called ‘Malda, a metropolis of Bengal, with its long list of kings, its gigantic walls and arches, its once stately places now the kennels of, and the vast untenanted city which has been left standing as a spectacle of desolation and warning to those who now are to India what its builders once were....’<sup>128</sup> Malda commanded the routes that came in different directions across Ghoraghat to Kamrup and Tibet, over Kajangal and Bagdi to Cuttack, and down the Ganges to Dacca. On the west, it opened the doors to the cities of northern India. On account of its geographical location, it may be called the catalyst for the control of the whole of the North-Eastern Indian trade.

*Akbarnamah* mentioned the name of Malda as an essential centre of trade and commerce.<sup>129</sup> Tavernier mentioned the name of Malda when he travelled to Bengal in 1666 A.D.<sup>130</sup> Alexander Hamilton described Malda as a large town, well inhabited and frequented by merchants of the different nations.<sup>131</sup> During the reign of Aurangzeb and the viceroyalty of Shaista Khan, Malda formed a part of the *jagir* of Shaista Khan.<sup>132</sup>

There were some historical and commercial factors that had their significance in conjunction with other geographical factors in the economic life of Malda town. The river system of Mahananda determined the morphology and growth of the Malda town. Several other rivers also picked the development of the Malda town. According to James Fergusson, an architect and

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<sup>128</sup> W.W Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, London: Smith Elder and Co., 1897, p.7.

<sup>129</sup> Ananad Gopal Ghosh, ‘Malda (West Bengal) As a Trading Centre in the Seventeenth Century’, *PIHC*, Vol. 36, 1975, p. 276.

<sup>130</sup> Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol.II, p.20.

<sup>131</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies (1688-1723)*, Vol.II, Edinburgh: John Mosman, 1727, p. 22.

<sup>132</sup> W.K. Firminger, *The Malda Diary and Consultations, (1680-82)*, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIV, New Series, 1918, p.4.



distinguished art historian, the Kosi, which now falls in the Ganges near Bhagalpur, flows through north Bengal. The Kosi, therefore, might have contributed to the building up of the southern part of North Bengal.<sup>133</sup>

Streynsham Master in his diary notes about the Malda that ‘The town is small, but conveniently seated on a branch of the Ganges and a small river from Morung which joyne a little above the towne, which is of great resort, being the staple of cloth, etc. for that part of the country, and comes in from all part within thirty or fourty miles. The chief trade-driven there is by Factors of Agra, Guzzaratt [Gujarat]. Bannares Merchants, Who yearly send them from fifteen to twenty five Patellas [patella], who's leading consists of cossaes and mullmulls from ½ rupees to 5 rupees per piece, and mundeels [mandils] and Elatches of all sorts, valued at about one lack each Patella, and about that half of that amount by landing said goods and raw silk (in goodness inferior to that procured about Cassambazar)’.<sup>134</sup> Malda goods were shipped to Dacca, Murshidabad, Rajmahal, Patna, and other places in interprovincial trade.

One noticeable feature is that there was no professionally skilled local mercantile community at Malda like Surat in the same period.<sup>135</sup> However, some small local merchants acted as brokers either to the indigenous or to foreign merchants in Malda. Such was the trading pattern of Malda before the coming of the Europeans in the picture.<sup>136</sup> The English connection with Malda began with establishing a factory there in 1680 A.D. The English were the first Europeans to settle

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<sup>133</sup> Ananad Gopal Ghosh, op. cit., p. 278.

<sup>134</sup> R. C. Temple, ed., *The Diaries of Streynsham Master, 1675-1680*, Vol.I, London: John Murray, 1911, pp.399-400.

<sup>135</sup> Shagufta Parveen, *Major Towns and Ports in the Mughal Empire and the Study of their Administration: As Reflected by European sources*, P.hd Thesis, Submitted in Aligarh Muslim University, 2015, p. 149.

<sup>136</sup> Ananda Gopal Ghosh, op. cit., p. 279.

at Malda for trade.<sup>137</sup> But the exact date of their establishment is not known. The French were the third and the last European power to enter into the race for commercial transactions with Malda. With the European entrance into the market, the demands for the goods were tremendously increased. Naturally, a triangular competition arose among the English, Dutch, and indigenous merchants. The most important was the competition of the indigenous merchants. The most vehement opposition came from Haranarayan Kanungo (custom officer) of Bengal, who had taken Malda on lease from Shaista Khan.<sup>138</sup> One of the most exclusive ways in which indigenous merchants put a check on the European company was through their money lending. The major problem was that the company could not properly supply sufficient money for the investment. Naturally, the factory factors depended upon the local merchants for the advantage of the company's need and were charged interest at the rate of 1% per month.<sup>139</sup>

The problem of balance of trade was another factor that arrested the growth of European trade at Malda as elsewhere. Because there was very little hope of trading any barter at Malda, the European companies procured goods for export mainly through merchant-middlemen. In most cases, they could not deal directly with the producers. They had to provide *dadni* or advance to intermediaries who, in their turn, paid advances to weavers and artisans at the proper time of the year. The principal merchants were Ganesh Das and Shambhu Das. Besides these merchants, the factors also contracted directly with the weavers through the *dellals* (middlemen), such as Crepol (possible Sripal) Dellol and Moniram Dellol. The chief advantage of this system was that the goods could be purchased at least eight or ten percent cheaper than the ready money purchase.<sup>140</sup> The

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<sup>137</sup> R. C. Temple, op.cit. p.401.

<sup>138</sup> W.K. Firminger, *The Malda Diary and Consultations, (1680-82)*, pp.4-5.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p. 54.

<sup>140</sup> Diary of Streynsham Master, Vol. I, pp.25-26.

Indian merchants also made advances to the weavers at a specified time every year. But a considerable part of their trade was carried on by the ready money purchase system.<sup>141</sup> This was, in short, the trading pattern and organization of the Malda regions in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Malda was acting as an internal port of Pandua and its ruins of brickbats and fragments of pottery strewn near the Jami Masjid show it to be an old town divided into several Mahallas.<sup>142</sup> Malda acted as the warehouse for the goods coming by river from the interior. Its earliest mosque of this period was built in 1455 and the last one in 1531 with the construction of a well by a woman named Bonamalti.<sup>143</sup> Malda again came up as a production centre of cotton and silk from the middle of the seventeenth century with the increasing demand of the English Company. Perhaps their settlements at Hughli helped them to settle factory at Malda from 1680. Cunningham found that till the 10<sup>th</sup> milestone to Panda from Malda there were shops lined on both sides of the paved road making the linkage very clear.<sup>144</sup> He mentioned tanks and swamps within the city of Pandua that created problems of space in the city with the increase of population.

Old Malda, the town which lies just east of the confluence of the Mahananda and Kalindi rivers, is part of the English Bazar urban agglomeration. The town rose to prominence as the river port of the old capital of Pandua. Malda which was a prosperous textile town specialising in clothe for export, was full of ruinous houses, which are overgrown with weeds, and shelter dirt of every kind, giving it an uncommonly miserable appearance. The towns of ruined Zamindars, like

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid, p.2-3.

<sup>142</sup> S. Abid Ali Khan, *Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua*, ed. & revised by H. E. Stapleton, Calcutta: Government of West Bengal, 1986, reprint, pp. 132-33.

<sup>143</sup> Alexander Cunningham, *Report of a Tour in Bihar and Bengal, 1879-80*, Vol. XV, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2000, p. 78.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p. 81.

Krishnanagar in Nadia, must have suffered severely. On the other hand, places of pilgrimage, like Gaya, and Puri, flourished under British rule. But major new market centres developed at places like Narayanganj and Sirajganj.<sup>145</sup>

## **Hugli**

As we have mentioned above Satgaon was an important port town before the rise of Hugli. It is a well-known fact that the river Saraswati on which Satgaon was situated began silting up. The enormous amount of sand reduced the water supply and narrowed its channels. Consequently, it was not navigable for big ships except in monsoon season; only smaller vessels could enter therein normal days. This was the main factor that the Portuguese shifted their attention from Satgaon to the nearby Hugli port, wherein big ships could well ply. Hugli emerged more significantly as a port city when the Mughals rescued it from the Portuguese in 1632. The main factor for expelling the Portuguese from Hugli was their monopoly of overseas trade and supremacy in the Eastern Seas.

Consequently, they became an eyesore for the Mughal nobility and other foreign merchants operating in Bengal. Hugli, from 1632 onwards, functioned as the royal port and Mughal offices, and the officials also maintained records.<sup>146</sup> Portuguese trade diminished at Hugli, and with this came to an end the first phase of the rise of Hugli and the Portuguese mercantile activities there.

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<sup>145</sup> P. J. Marshal, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead Eastern India 1740-1828*, Vol. II.1 of the *New Cambridge History of India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 161.

<sup>146</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, 'The Rise and Decline of Hugli: A Port in Medieval Bengal' in Sushil Chaudhury, ed., *Companies, Commerce and Merchants: Bengal in the Pre-Colonial Era*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2017, p. 13.

**Figure-7**

**The Capture of Hugli Port, 1632.**



Source: <https://www.rct.uk/collection/1005025-u/the-capture-of-port-hoogly-june-october-1632>

The origin of the port town of Hugli is shrouded in darkness. It has been established without any shade of doubt that the Portuguese were the founders of Hugli port.<sup>147</sup> The most definitive

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<sup>147</sup> J. J. A. Compos, *The History of Portuguese in Bengal*, pp. 22, 57.

proof of this assertion is that Ceasor Federick spoke only about Satgaon in 1567. And did not mention Hugli. Neither any Persian chronicle nor any foreign traveler's account ever corroborates Hugli's contention before Akbar's conquest of Bengal. Manrique, who was in Bengal in 1628-29 does not specify the date of the foundation of Hugli but he traces the circumstances leading to the foundation of Hugli by the Portuguese.<sup>148</sup> Manrique says, 'Of the various Bandels or trading-ports which the Portuguese had in the kingdom of Bengal during the last fifty years, the richest, the most flourishing, and most populous was that of Hugli [Ogolim]. As to the common emporium, vessels of India, China, Malacca, and Manila were repaired in great numbers. The natives of the country and the Hindustanis, the Mogols, the Persians, and the Armenians came there to fetch goods. Besides this very lucrative trade, the Portuguese who had settled there carried on much more important commerce, namely the salt trade of the kingdom of Angelim. We may judge its importance by the fact that they paid yearly into the custom-houses of the Mogol above a hundred thousand tankas in duties'.<sup>149</sup>

R.C Temple, who edited the work of Thomas Bowrey, has quoted Willen Schouten and said, Ougly [Hugli] is fairly large. Its length renders it pleasant because it is built on the bank of the Ganges. The streets were wide: they were not paved. There are pretty walks, fine buildings after the country's fashion; well-stocked shops; convenient houses; depots for all kinds of merchandise, particularly silks; fine lines, and other materials from all the provinces in India. There are many Moor merchants there who carry on a great trade there. There are also a great number of idolators, Benjaness, and genitives who live peaceably under the government of the Moors'.<sup>150</sup> On

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<sup>148</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, 'The Rise and Decline of Hugli: A Port in Medieval Bengal', pp. 4-5.

<sup>149</sup> *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique*, 1629-1643, Vol. II, p. 392.

<sup>150</sup> Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries Round the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, op.cit, p. 168, n.2.

the other hand, Thomas Bowrey has informed us that ‘The towne or the city of Hugli is a famous and sumptuous place, adorned with many fine structures, and very populous what added to the beauty hereof, it is well furnished with gardens, fine graves, a very large Bazar or market place, one of the finest Chowltrees ( or free lodging houses for all travellers) that is contained in this kingdom, and, more Especially, the two fine European factories, namely the English and Dutch.’<sup>151</sup>

Ralph Fitch, the English traveller, visited Hugli in 1588 and stated that Hugli was the ‘chief keep’ of the Portuguese.<sup>152</sup> According to *Ain-i Akbari*, Hugli was a more essential port than Satgaon.<sup>153</sup> Thus, it appears that at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Hugli became the premier port of Bengal. Abdul Hamid Lahori mentions that there were 64 large *dingis*, 57 *ghrabs*, and 200 *jaliyas* at Hugli when the city was sacked in 1632 by Qasim Khan, the governor of Shah Jahan.<sup>154</sup>

The Portuguese availed religious freedom at Hugli. They built a church there. When Bernier visited Hugli he estimated that 8000-9000 Christians lived there. Thomas Bowrey spoke of the luxury of Hugli and of the English and Dutch establishments there. Linschoten spoke of its fine paved roads, well-stocked shops, the emporia-style market, and the fine clothes available there. The city, built along the river, had fine walks, magnificent gardens, and grand houses.<sup>155</sup> Many Mughals and Persians also resided in Hugli, of whom a good number were migrants from Persia and north India. Apart from the Dutch and the English merchants, many immigrant Persians

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid. p. 167.

<sup>152</sup> J. J. A. Compos, *The History of Portuguese in Bengal*, p.55.

<sup>153</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, (Jarrett and Sarkar), Vol.II, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1891, p.137.

<sup>154</sup> Abdul Hamid Lahori, *Badshahnama*, Vol. 1, Calcutta: Bibliotheca India, 1867, p. 438; Sushil Chaudhury, *Companies, Commerce Merchants: Bengal in the Pre-Colonial Era*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2017, p. 8.

<sup>155</sup> Francois Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, 1656-1668*, Archibald Constable (Tr), 1891, , London: Oxford University Press, 1916 (2nd edition), p. 439; L.S.S. O’Malley and Manmohan Chakraborty, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Hooghly*, Calcutta: The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, 1912, P.32; Rila Mukherjee, op.cit. p.179.

and Mughal officers also made an investment in overseas trade in Hugli. Sushil Chaudhari says, ‘Important state officials like the subadars of Bengal, Shah Shuja, Mir Jumla, Shaista Khan, Azim-us-Shan, the Nawab of Patna–Buzurg Umeed Khan, and the governors of Hugli, Pipli and Balasore carried on an extensive overseas trade’.<sup>156</sup> Nurullah Khan, the faujdar of Hugli, Jessore, Burdwan, Midnapore and Hijli, as well as Khwaja Mohammed Fazel Kashmiri, a prominent merchant of Kashmir, Janardan Seth, a Hindu merchant, Khwaja Sarhad, an Arminian merchant, also invested capital in overseas trade. This is enough to establish that Hugli became a cosmopolitan city. The Persians especially the Shia, built their mosques and Imambadas too.

Hugli began to decline from about the middle of the 18th century, especially after the withdrawal of the English East India Company from Hugli to Calcutta, which had deeper water and was strategically and geographically more suitable. After the foundation of Calcutta in 1690. After most of the merchants, the English, the French and the Arminians, the Persians, and the local merchants, both Hindus and Muslims began to flock to Calcutta. Thomas Bowrey mentions that the city was not the same everywhere. Some of the areas were beautiful where the rich merchants resided...There was a big market...but there were other markets spread all over the city. In these markets, cotton textiles and other kinds of goods were also sold.<sup>157</sup> However, the most graphic account of the city was provided by the French traveller L’Estra “The city, situated on the bank of the river, had good air and climate. Everything was available and the food was very cheap. The land around was well cultivated and fertile. Nearby was a forest with orange and other fruits which were pleasant to eat. Sugar was available in plenty. There were so many domestic animals that their number easily exceeded twenty thousand. For this reason, milk, butter, cheese, etc., were

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<sup>156</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, ‘*The Rise and Decline of Hugli: A Port in Medieval Bengal*’ p. 26.

<sup>157</sup> Aniruddha Ray, *Towns and Cities of Medieval India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2015, p. 456.



available in plenty in the villages and towns around Hugli. Big chickens were sold in the market. In the nearby forest, monkeys, deer, rabbits, and even roaming elephants could be seen.”<sup>158</sup>

With the growing commercial and political power, the rise in the power of Chrustuab and Jesuit missionaries were also witnessed. Churches and colleges were established in Hijli, Banja, Hugli, Bandel, Chittagong and other Portuguese centres. At Hugli, they established an aim-house, the Casa da Misericordia, the first of its kind in Bengal. They also constructed the first hospital, according to the modern sense of the term. They started missionary schools and had sent the Bengali students to the Jesuits College at Goa.

### **Chandannagar**

Chandannagar is renowned as an erstwhile French colony. The city originated from three villages: Boro, Gondolpara, and Khalisani, with a striking similarity to the case of Kolkata, Sutanuti, and Gobindapur for Calcutta's origin. Its reference is said to have found Bipradas Pipilai (c.1495)'s Manasamangal, a Bengali folk literature wherein there appears the name Boro that is presently a quarter of the town lying on the riverside.<sup>159</sup> Chandernagore is more than 300 years old. The city has passed through slow urbanization processes starting from the time of Mughal rule in Bengal. The actual pace of urbanization started after the establishment of the French settlement there.

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<sup>158</sup> Aniruddha Ray, op.cit. p. 460.

<sup>159</sup> Subhendu Ghosh and Giasuddin Siddique, 'A Dependent City in Independent India in Hugli District: Its Evolution, Expansion and Related Issues', *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, July-August 2018, p. 389.

The village Khalisani, located on the bank of Saraswati River which was then fast-flowing but later turned into an abandoned channel of the Bhagirathi. The river Bhagirathi facilitated as an easy route of fleets engaged in export and import of commodities to and fro the port Saptagram and Bazra. Later, the city of Chandannagar originated from three villages: Boro, Gondolpara and Khalisani, with a striking similarity to the case of Kolkata.<sup>160</sup> The foreign merchants also visited there as it was in close proximity to Hugli.<sup>161</sup> Two famous temples of '*Chandi*' and '*Bishalakshmi*' have grown with the patronage of the cultivators and labourers of the northern part of Chandernagore, which gained more importance from these wealthy traders made Chandannagar emerge as a temple town at the very first phase of its urbanization.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Subhendu Ghosh and Giasuddin Siddique, op.cit. p. 390.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p. 390-91.

<sup>162</sup> *Bengal District Gazetteers*: Hooghly, P.259.

**Figure-8**

**Gate of Chandannagore**



Source: <https://touristdestinationoffbeat.wordpress.com/2020/06/22/chandannagar-france>.

Since the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and the English, established their trading centres on the west bank of the River Hugli; the French preferred Chandernagore and built a *kuthi* in Boro Kisanpur in the north Chandernagore in 1673.<sup>163</sup> The French East India Company managed permission for free trade from the Nawab of Bengal in 1693 and extended their *kuthi* area as a factory and expanded their trade there. They built Forte de Orien in 1696. Water transport

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<sup>163</sup> S. K. Mitra, *Hugli Jelar Itihas O Banga Samaj* (in Bengali), Calcutta: Mitrani, 1948, p. 996.

combined with the land transport facility of the Grand Trunk road stimulated the expansion of trade and urbanization at Chandernagore.<sup>164</sup>

In the later Mughal Period, surrounding areas like Chinsurah situated 26 kilometers away, a small garrison town named Frederik Nagore (modern: Serampore) was developed as a Danish colony. The Danes then secured a *farman* from Nawab Alivardi Khan in 1755 and contributed to the rapid urbanization of Serampore. They established their factories, *godowns*, administrative buildings, and a bazaar and thus furthered industrial development their focusing on cotton, silk, sugar, and indigo trade. The entire belt of the river Hugli to Kolkata is complemented by a considerable number of urban places and bazaars developed by the French and the Danes. Some such bazaars and manufacturing centres were located at Golahor, Magra, Haripal, Rajbalhat, Dinwanganj, Ghatal and Radhanagar etc.<sup>165</sup> In course of time, schools and hospitals were also developed alongside their residential colonies.

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<sup>164</sup> Subhendu Ghosh and Giasuddin Siddique, op.cit. p. 391.

<sup>165</sup> *Bengal District Gazetteers: Hooghly*, pp.178-79.

**Figure-9**

**Chandernagor Museum & Institute De Chandernagor.**



Source: <https://gotraveldiscoverer.wordpress.com/2017/06/13/chandernagor-the-lost-french-colony-of-west-bengal/>.

**Balasore**

Balasore, Pipli, and Harishpur became important ports in the Mughal period. These places became centres of overseas trade and shipbuilding also. Balasore derived its name from Bal-Ishwara, which means the young Lord or the Lord of strength.<sup>166</sup> It was situated 25 km from the sea coast on the bank of the Boori Balang River.<sup>167</sup> Balasore grew to prominence as a manufacturing and commercial centre as a seaport in the 1730s. It emerged as the most crucial port

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<sup>166</sup> Pramod Sangar, *Growth of English Trade under the Mughal*, Jalandhar: ABS Publication, 1993, p. 92.

<sup>167</sup> Animesh Ray, *Maritime India: Ports and Shipping*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1999, p.51.

where there were regular voyages to Ceylon, Malacca, Pegu, and other Southeast Asian ports. The Portuguese, the Dutch, and the English had settled at Pipli and Balasore. The Dutch landed at Balasore in 1625.

The British began their trade first at Hariharpur and Balasore in 1633. Still, they concentrated on Balasore as it had better commercial linkage and was also an important centre of muslin production. On the other hand, the growing scarcity of cloth at Masulipatnam on account of the widespread Gujarat famine of 1630-31 necessitated opening up a new centre of trade and consequently, the English advanced from the East Coast up to the Bay of Bengal. The importance of Balasore grew as a result of the expulsion of the Portuguese from Hijli by the Mughals in 1636 and the decay of Pipli.<sup>168</sup>

Balasore and its adjacent regions were the centres for the production of different kinds of textile goods. The European companies, particularly the English, who purchased a lot of textile goods for exportation, established factories at Balasore. Balasore was an emporium of cotton yarn, and tassar manufactures the interior hinterland and surrounding places. Most well-known among the centres arranged in order of quality of goods manufactured were at Suro (Soro), situated 20 miles distance of Balasore, was a place for the production of sannoes, Harrapore (Hariharpur) and Mohunpure (Mohanpur), all specializing in the manufacture of sannoes. Hariharpur was an important centre of manufacture of Sannoos and Cassayes (khasa).<sup>169</sup> Balasore was near the country of the Raja of Tillbri-Chrumbung (Tribikarmbhanj i.e. Mayurbhanj) where the quantity of Tassar or herba was procurable. It was also famous for the production of “Ginghams”<sup>170</sup> (a kind of

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<sup>168</sup> Patit Paban Mishra, *Balasore Port-Town in Seventeenth Century, PIHC*, Vol.59, 1998, p. 303.

<sup>169</sup> Kanaklatha Mukund, ‘*Indian Textile Trade in the 17th and 18th Centuries- Structure, Organisation and Responses*’, *EPW*, 1992, p.62.

<sup>170</sup> Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of Countries around the Bay of Bengal, 1669 to 1679*, Second Series, ed. by Richard C. Temple, Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1903, p. 231.

cotton cloth commonly called gingham), Herba, Lungees (Silk or Cotton loincloth) and another sort of Herba goods. It was an essential centre for the production and trade in cloth as the varieties of textiles found there included costly Sannoos, dimities, mulmuls<sup>171</sup>, silken and cotton rumal<sup>172</sup>, and silken bed sheets. At the same time, cotton yarn was also exported from Balasore.

Thomas Bowrey has given a fascinating account of the trade of Balasore that the English ships visited every year for filling in a variety of cotton goods like sanoes, gingham, rumals, and cotton yarn from Balasore and Hugli. The loaded ships then left for Masulipatnam and Madras, where many other goods added up, and finally left England by the end of January. The other important thing he remarked about was the availability of Cod-Musk that was found in abundance in Balasore. It was exported to England and Holland.<sup>173</sup>

The English goods brought into Balasore consisted mainly of scarlet blades, broadcloths of a diverse sort, vermillion, brimstone, lead, copper, and coral.<sup>174</sup> In 1642 A.D., the English factories of Balasore sold or bartered their glasses, knives, lead, and broadcloth for sugar, guarra<sup>175</sup>, Sannoos, cassaes<sup>176</sup>, iron, and ginghams, to Persia.<sup>177</sup> About 1650 A.D the goods which came from Hugli to Balasore consisted of raw silk, saltpetre, sugar, dry ginger, beeswax, long pepper, rice, oil, and wheat, costing half of what it would be at other places.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Kanaklatha Mukund, op.cit, p.67.

<sup>172</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, *Trade and Commercial Organization in Bengal, 1650- 1720*, Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1975, p.262.

<sup>173</sup> Thomas Bowrey, op.cit, pp. 128-31.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. p.130.

<sup>175</sup> S. Parveen, op.cit, p. 36.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>177</sup> William Foster, *The English Factories in India (1642-45)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913, p. 65.

<sup>178</sup> William Foster, *The English Factories in India (1646-50)*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1914, p. 338.

Balasore was also known for shipbuilding and repairing centre with suitable dockyards, which seemed to have developed further after the advent of the English. Not only that, it was also a suitable halting place for the ships. In the 1630s the English Factor, Burton described Balasore as a sea town where East India Company's servants did shipping.<sup>179</sup> In 1638 the Masulipatnam factors, Thomas Clerk and Richard Hudson instructed Thomas Godfrey, Master of the Coaster, to proceed to Balasore for refitting their ship.<sup>180</sup>

The close connection between Balasore and Hugli necessitated constant coastal trade between the two places. Due to the Hugli's navigation difficulties, goods were usually brought down from Bengal in small ships and trans-shipped at Pipli and Balasore. About 1650 A.D., the following articles came from the letter of James Bridgeman (Abroad the Lioness) to the company, raw silk, saltpetre, sugar, dry ginger.<sup>181</sup> Hugli could also supply beeswax, long pepper, civet (a substance with a sharp smell, gained from a civet and exercised in making perfume), rice, butter, oil, and wheat, all at about half the price of other places. Balasore had trade relations with Dacca also.<sup>182</sup>

### **Chinsura**

Chinsurah, a small town, is situated on the west bank of river Hugli at a distance of about 50 km north to Kolkata. The name Chinsurah was derived from the cane called *chichira*.<sup>183</sup> The place was full of a type of cane called '*Chichira*'. From this probably name of the place 'Chuchura' or as the

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<sup>179</sup> Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Studies in Economic Life in Mughal India*, Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1975, p. 333.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p.333.

<sup>181</sup> Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *Studies in Economic Life in Mughal India*, p. 319.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. pp. 319.

<sup>183</sup> Subrata Pal, *Ancient Dutch Colony Chinsurah – A Neglected Destination with Tourism Potential & Great Archeological Value* "International Journal of Scientific Progress and Research, 2019, p. 42.



Hollanders pronounced ‘Chinsurah’ developed. The Dutch called the place Chinsurah and the locals used the name Chuchura. It was developed by the Dutch in early seventeenth century when they set their foot in Bengal for trade. Besides trading, they were involved in other activities for the improvement of the newly formed township. The Dutch arrived India in 1605 and established their colony at Hugli in 1635. Chinsurah came to be acquired by the VOC, along with Baranagore and Bazaar Mirjapur in 1656, as a lease from the Mughal emperor. In this connection, Om Prakash Chouhan says, ‘Pieter Sterthemius was appointed the first director of the Bengal factories and authorized to choose between Kasimbazar and Hugli for his headquarters. In April 1656, Sterthemius provisionally chose Kasimbazar, but later in the year moved over to Hugli, which continued to be the seat of the Dutch directorate of Bengal for nearly a century and a half. The Company leased the villages of Chinsura, Baranagar, and Bazar Mirzapur for an annual ground rent of Rs. 1,574’.<sup>184</sup> The Dutch primarily dealt in commodities like muslin, opium, saltpetre, precious stones, indigo, silk, spices etc. The Mughal rulers from the time of Shah Jahan to Aurangzeb and Prince Muhammad Azam issued farmans from time to time providing trade facilities to the Dutch traders and ensured their privileges. Once when the Dutch complained about infringement of their trade facilities ‘... the Governor of Bengal was commanded that no one shall exact more from them than was authorised by ancient custom and shall not introduce any new laws or customs on that head.’<sup>185</sup> Then the Governor of Bengal, Shah Shuja granted at least four more privileges to the Dutch. At that time, the Company thought about new dimensions for Bengal trade. So the Dutch constituted the settlement of Chinsurah as it’s headquarter in Bengal.<sup>186</sup>

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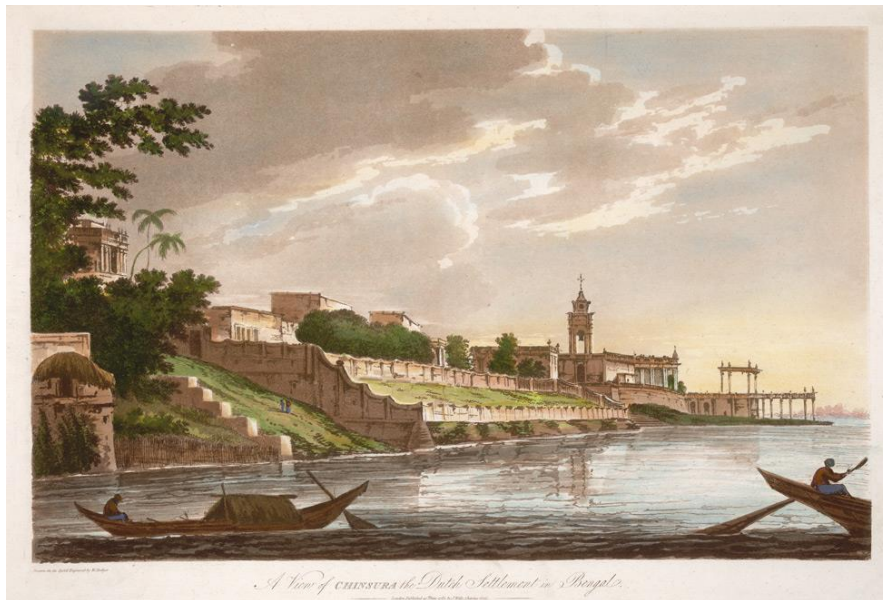
<sup>184</sup> Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal 1630-1720*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 40.

<sup>185</sup> John Splinter Stavorinus, *Journey to the East Indies*, tr. By Samuel Hull Wilcocke, Vol. III, London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1798, p. 84.

<sup>186</sup> Om Prakash, Op-cit., pp. 39-40.

**Figure-10**

**The Dutch settlement in Chinsura**



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

Studies on the interactions between the VOC and the local merchants or the Mughal administrators have, therefore, remained mostly confined to the mercantile context. Works of scholars like Om Prakash have examined these relations for Bengal and Om Prakash concluded that the Mughal merchant-officials extorted the VOC and the local brokers there, and the VOC either competed or collaborated with the local merchants.<sup>187</sup>

Chinsurah Hugli Mohsin College, located by the river Hugli, was actually one of the garden houses of the Dutch known as ‘Welgeleegen’, meaning ‘well situated’. This name indicated the beautiful position of the house on the riverbank. It was a pleasure house built by Albert Sichterman, Director of the VOC in Bengal. The Dutch constructed underground canals made of brick for the discharge

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<sup>187</sup> Om Prakash, op.cit. pp. 11.

of wastewater from Chinsurah into the river Hugli. The drain canals were well specious – almost 16’ high and 12’ wide. The Dutch also used these to escape in case of any attack by enemies.<sup>188</sup>

In Bharatchandra Ray’s *Annadamangal* of the eighteenth century the Dutch are referred to as, the *Olondaj*. At one place, it is written:

‘In the first quarter (of the city of Gaur) lives the hat-wearers, The Ingrej (English), the Olondaj (Dutch), the Firingi (Portuguese), the Farash (French); The Dinemar (Danish) and the Eleman (from Alemania) who fire with their cannons, They sail and bring different commodities loaded on their ships’.<sup>189</sup> Some scholars believe that the local people viewed the Dutch with some amount of awe and fear.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Shiwani Thakur, Ruchika Kulshrestha & Chef Vikas Singh, eds., *Tourism and Hospitality: Perspective, Patterns, and Practices*, New Delhi: Bharti Publication, 2020, p. 137.

<sup>189</sup> Bharatchandra Ray, ‘Annadamangal’, In Sribroejndranath Bandyopadhyay and Srishojonikanto Dash, eds., *Bharatchandra-Gronthaboli*, Vol. II, 1923, Kolkata, p. 10; Byapti Sur, ‘The Dutch East India Company through the Local Lens: Exploring the Dynamics of Indo-Dutch Relations in Seventeenth Century Bengal’, *IHR*, Vol. 44, No. 1, 2017, p. 67.

<sup>190</sup> Byapti Sur, op.cit.

**Figure-11**

**The VOC Factory at Hugli**



Source: <https://rkd.nl/nl/explore/images/292489>.

**Kasimbazar**

Kasimbazar is not mentioned in any historical record before the seventeenth century. Its rise in history was due to the conjuncture of certain fortuitous events. Kasimbazar filled the gap that was caused by the decay of the western part of Bengal: the decline of Satgaon in the sixteenth century, the decline of Hugli in the seventeenth century, and the as yet non-emergence of Calcutta as the chief port under the aegis of the English East India Company in the eighteenth century. Kasimbazar was therefore in a position to dominate the commerce of Bengal. It was frequented by Kashmiri, Gujrati, Persian, Armenian, and Turkish merchants who lived there.

Presently a small town in the suburbs of Beharampur in the district of Murshidabad, Kasimbazar, was once a big market town with several magnificent buildings, especially of Europeans. It was famous for its silk manufacture and was noted for its stocking.<sup>191</sup> The chief reason for this was that it was situated in an exceptionally advantageous position as it lay at the centre of what was known in the eighteenth century as the triangle or the island formed by the three rivers of the Bhagirathi, the Padma, and the Jalangi and as a result of which its system of riverine routes became famous. Kasimbazar enjoyed the use of one of the most extensive river networks of the province. On the other hand, it lay at the centre of the silk-growing area of Bengal.<sup>192</sup>

The shift of capital from Dacca in the east to Murshidabad in the west around 1704-05 during the time of Murshid Quli Khan signified the culmination of the process of the east-to-west shift that had started as early as in the mid-sixteenth century. Along with the banker Manickchand, the founder of the financial House of the Jagat Seths, the Bengal Nawabs dominated the economic and political life of Bengal as a powerful oligarchy of nawabi-financial-court interests. However, their thrust was primarily focused on overland and riverine trade. Kasimbazar's close proximity to Murshidabad also provided an opportunity of easy access to the European merchants to the royal mint and the nawabi court of Murshidabad. This provided them with the comfortable availability of money for trade and facility in negotiations with the Court.

Kasimbazar and its environs produced a great amount of silk every year. Apart from raw silk which may be subdivided into the best November bund (a wall surrounding an industry), the March bund, and the June-July bunds (the worst), Kasimbazar also produced a variety of silk known as the

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<sup>191</sup> Walter Hamilton, *East India Gazetteer*, Vol.I, 2nd edn. London: Allen and Co., 1928, p. 455.

<sup>192</sup> Chandan Roy and Arindam Dey, *Murshidabad Silk Industry in West Bengal: A Study of its Glorious Past Present Crisis*, Munich Personal RePEc Archive, 2017, p. 3.

Guzerat, (much in demand in Gujerat), the Commercially, produced in the area of Kumarkhali, the Rungpore silk, some-what more expensive and therefore only sporadically invested in by the European companies.<sup>193</sup>

**Figure-12**

**Factory of East India Company at Kasimbazar**



Source: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery>

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<sup>193</sup> S. C. Nandy, "Palasi Judher age Maphasvaler Bangali Resam Byabasai", *Aitihāsik*, January-March, 1981, pp.72-103; Rila Mukherjee, 'The Story of Kasimbazar: Silk Merchants and Commerce in Eighteenth-Century India', *Review Fernand Braudel Centre*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1994, p. 509.



As early as 1685, the investment lists of the English East India Company's factory in Kasimbazar mention the family names of merchants who formed a coterie of the most important silk merchants cantering on the *dadni* or contract system procurement at Kasimbazar. This group lasted until the *dadni* system gave way to the agency system for the procurement of silk in 1754. About the trade radiating from Kasimbazar the work titled *Trade and Commercial Organization of Bengal, 1650-1720: With Special Reference to the English East India Company* (1975) is a well-explored and well-researched book, but the author has not given much attention to the size of the population of the Europeans settled at Kasimbazar or any details of their colonies and quarters there. However, a census of 1829 mentions 1,300 houses at Kasimbazar with 3,538 inhabitants, out of which 1,325 were Muslims and 2,213 Hindus and others. Farashdanga was the French colony, nimtollah was the Armenian colony, and Calcapur was the site of the Dutch factory while the English resided at Jalingi.<sup>194</sup> A graphic description about the decline of Kasimbazar is given by J.H. Tull Walsh. The downfall of Kasimbazar as a town and as a commercial centre, dates from 1813, when, as elsewhere mentioned, the Bhagirathi made a breach at a place called Katgunga, just above the present water-works at Farashdanga, and cut across the loop within which most of the town stood, leaving it with Berhampur to the east of the channel instead of the west. The change took the river about three miles from the old course and spoiled the town's facility for river traffic. The old channel, as it dried up, became filled with dirt and rubbish and converted, for a time, into a petilet swamp. A violent type of "fever" broke out, killing the inhabitants by hundreds and depopulating the chief portion of the town. The local weavers worked on at the commoner kinds

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<sup>194</sup> J.H. Tull Walsh, *A History of Murshidabad District (Bengal) : with Biographies of Some of Its Noted Families*, London: Jarrold & Sons, 1902, pp.44-45.

of *silk* and *ghurrah*, a cotton cloth, until their trade was overwhelmed by cheap goods turned out by Manchester machinery.<sup>195</sup>

## Patna

Patna served as the political and commercial centre for the entire province of Bihar. The trade structure of Bengal and Bihar involved the traders who differed from one another in terms of their assets, their functions, their scale of business, and their social and political connections. At one end of the scale were small retailers like phariyas and paruchinas and small rural traders like paikars, while at the other end were the great merchants who lived in cities and possessed elaborate procurement networks that often utilised the services of rural trading groups to buy commodities.<sup>196</sup> Due to these various facts and features, the city of Patna, like Rajmahal and Balasore, has been included in the present research.

*Comprehensive History of Bihar* edited by Syed Hasan Askari and Qeyamuddin Ahmad in two volumes (1983, 1987) dealing with Sultanate and Mughal periods separately are the most authentic work on the medieval history of Bihar. The two learned scholars have contributed several research articles also. Jagdish Narayan Sarkar's *Glimpses of medieval Bihar economy: thirteenth to mid-eighteenth century* (1987) and in recent years: Anand A. Yang's *Bazaar India: Market, Society and Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar* (1998) and Murari Kumar Jha's doctoral work, *The Political Economy of the Ganga River Highway of State Formation in Mughal India, c. 1600-1800* (Lieden, 2013, e-publication) are significant works on the subject. Besides, there are some very valuable research articles from several scholars.

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid. p. 45.

<sup>196</sup> Kumkum Banerjee, 'Grain traders and the East India Company: Patna and its hinterland in the Late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', *IESHR*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, 1986, pp. 410.



During the rule of the Delhi Sultanate, Bihar was almost tagged to Bengal. But it became an independent subah of the Mughal Empire in 1580 and Mirza Aziz Kokah was formally appointed as Subahdar there. But from a mercantile point of view, it was very much attached to Bengal both spatially and characteristically. That is why it is, like Balasore and Rajmahal, included here in this study. Patna, Bihar's capital, remained conveniently situated on the Ganges-the principal artery of communication. Through Jharkhand and Teliagarhi pass, it could well be accessed for overland trade. As an urban centre Patna began to grow from the time of Sher Shah, who built a fort there and thus saved the city from the inundation of the Ganges. It is also well known that Sher Shah built sarais there and many other places. Markets were also set up in most of the sarais. Many of the sarai became mandis i.e. markets, where the peasants came to sell their produce. These in turn, became, in time, the nuclei around which *qasbas* (towns) grew, where trade and handicrafts developed.<sup>197</sup> 'Apart from being an administrative and strategic centre for the Mughals, the rise of Patna as a trading hub was closely linked to the growth of commercial traffic conducted by the Asian and European merchants. Portuguese merchants seem to have frequented Patna in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries and their presence was noted by the English merchants who were trying to establish a factory there in the 1620s.'<sup>198</sup>

Patna possessed tremendous commercial potential. Opium, saltpetre, sugar, turmeric and cotton textiles constituted the main production of Bihar and they formed a solid foundation for its multi-layered trade for which Patna served as an outlet for these commodities during sixteen teeth-

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<sup>197</sup> Tabish Hashmi, *Patna: A city in the Sixteenth, the Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Century*, *IRJMST*, Vol. 9, Issue 5, 2018, pp. 90.

<sup>198</sup> R. C. Temple, Bart, ed., 'Documents relating to the first English commercial mission to Patna, 1620-1621,' *The Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research*, Vol. 43, 1914, pp. 71, 73, 83; Murari Kumar Jha, *The Political Economy of the Ganga River Highway of State Formation in Mughal India, c. 1600-1800* (Lieden, 2013, e-publication), p.115.

eighteenth centuries particularly.<sup>199</sup> The Dutch East India Company established its factory at Patna in 1638 but it was soon closed. However, a Dutch factory was again established at Patna between 1645 and 1651.<sup>200</sup> It was housed in the present Patna Collectorate building. The English built their factory in Patna at Alamganj in 1620 but was got closed in 1621. Again in 1651, the English East India Company revived the factory. The present Government Press of Bihar located at Gulzar Bagh is housed there.<sup>201</sup> While In 1774, Danes East India Company established its factory in Patna and now it is known as Nepali Kothi in the city. On the other hand, the French started a factor at Patna in 1734 and it was located most likely at Mittenghat or Mitanghat in old Patna city area.<sup>202</sup> The trade of the European companies played a major role in expanding Patna's commercial importance. By 1620, Patna was regarded as the cheapest mart town of all Bengal. It emerged as large business centre known for trade in different commodities. These business centres were located in the Qila, Chouk-Shikarpur, Khawaja Kalan, Dahawalpura, Nagla, Guzri, Mal Salami, Nai Sarak (Gulzarbagh), and Doolighat, Danke ki Imli, Machchihata, Kanhaiya Toli, Golakpur and Mehendru etc. These were *katras*, *golas* or *mandis* for wholesale marketing in the city and they were located in the western part of Patna. Besides them, there were several small bazaars for retail marketing in the city and adjoining *qasbas*. When Aurangzeb's grandson, Azim ush-Shan, became the governor of Patna in 1703-1707, Patna was named Azimabad after his name.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Hameeda K. Naqvi, *Urban Centers and Industries in Upper India 1556-1806*, Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1968, p. 100.

<sup>200</sup> Om Prakash, op.cit. pp. 38-39.

<sup>201</sup> Susil Chaudhury, *Trade and Commercial Organization of Bengal, 1650-1720*, pp. 15-20.

<sup>202</sup> Aniruddha Ray, 'Establishment of the French Factory at Patna', *PIHC*, Vol. 61, Part One: Millennium (2000-2001), pp. 413-23.

<sup>203</sup> J. B. Tavemier, *Travels in India*, edited by W. Crook, p. 238; Qeyamuddin Ahmad, 'Patna-Azimabad (1540-1765): A Sketch' In *Patna Through the Ages: Glimpses of History, Society & Economy*, ed. Qeyamuddin Ahmad, Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1988, pp. 71-8; Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, 'Patna and Its Environs in the Seventeenth Century—A Study in Economic History', *The Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, Vol 34, no. 1-2, 1948, pp. 126-53; Nripendra Kumar Shrivastava, *Contribution of Trade and Commerce in the Trend and Pattern of Urban*

About Patna's rapidly growing commercial importance and its trade Ralf Fitch in 1586, commented, 'Patna is a very long and great town there is a trade of cotton and cloth of cotton, much sugar which they carried from hence to Bangla and India, very much opium and other commodities.'<sup>204</sup> In the 1670s, Thomas Bowery called Patna a country of very great traffic and commerce, and it is really a great gate that opens into Bengal and Orissa and so consequently into most parts of India viz., from the northern kingdoms or empires (by land), namely Persia, Kirman, Georgia, and Tartaria etc. The commodities of those countries are transported hither by caffila, who also export the commodities brought hither from here by the English and Dutch as also of this kingdom'.<sup>205</sup> Thevenot, the French merchant, noted in 1666 that Patna was a great city lying on the west side of the Ganges and the Dutch factory was located there. Corn, rice, sugar, ginger, long pepper, cotton, silk and several other commodities were produced there.<sup>206</sup> Nikolaas de Graaf (also known as Nicolaus De Graaff), a Dutch surgeon and voyager, visited Patna in 1670 and noted, 'From one end of the town to other, throughout the whole of its length, stretches a large street full of shops where a great trade in all kinds of things is carried on and where are to be found very clever workmen. This street is intersected right and left by several others, some of which lead to the country and the others to the Ganges. At the farthest end of the town and in the highest part of it there is a great square for the market, also a very fine place where the Nabab lives and a large Kettera [*katra*, a market- place] where are to be found a number of people of diverse nations as well as all kinds of merchandise.'<sup>207</sup>

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*Growth of Patna (1657-1765)*, PIHC, Vol. 71, 2010-2011, pp. 330-31.

<sup>204</sup> Ralph Fitch, *Early Travels in India 1583-1619*, ed. by William Foster, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 23-24.

<sup>205</sup> Thomas Bowrey, *A Geographical Account of the Countries Around the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679*, p. 221.

<sup>206</sup> Surendranth Sen, ed., *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, New Delhi: National Archives of India, 1949, p. 96.

<sup>207</sup> Nicolas Van de Graaf, *Aux Indes Orientales Et en...*, Amsterdam: Chez Jean Fredric Bernard,

**Figure-13**

**Main Street of Patna.**



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patna#/media/File:Main\\_street\\_of\\_Patna,\\_1814-15](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patna#/media/File:Main_street_of_Patna,_1814-15)

**Figure-14**  
**Ruins of the Dutch Factory in Patna**



Source: <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery>

Patna School of painting also known as Patna Qalam of the colonial period. Patna Qalam depicts some very interesting paintings which portrayed various bazaar tradesmen, craftsmen and peddlers. These paintings also depict the town and village sites as well as various means of transport such as bullock carts, palanquins etc. Besides, these paintings also illustrate the socio-cultural life of the city.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Neel Rekha, 'The Patna School of Paintinng: A Brief History (1760-1880)', *PIHC*, Vol. 72, part 1, 2011, pp. 997-1007.

Patna had a prolific mint. Patna mint was one of the major mints of India. It is claimed that a mint began to operate and strike coins as early as the visit of the first Mughal Emperor, Babur to Maner near Patna where Sufi shrine of Yahya Maneri existed in 1529. Babur visited the shrine and offered some money as a tribute and appointed his son-in-law as the governor of the province with instruction to reserve a sum of one crore twenty-five lakhs as the revenue for the royal treasury.<sup>209</sup> When Akbar reorganized the imperial mints in 1577-78 Patna was included as an important mint that continued to issue coins in silver till 1798. This mint remained the largest mint of the region until 1655, though its share to the total volume of coin fell after reaching the peak in 1617-26.<sup>210</sup> Patna mint issued far more coins than the mints of Bengal combined. This was probably because of its position as a great river port, where the Bengal and Upper-Indian boats had their termini so that silver was directly brought up to it from the Bay of Bengal.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> A. S. Beveridge, *The Memoirs of Babur*, Vol. II (rept), New Delhi: 1973, p.82; S. H. Hodivala, 'Tatta or Patna', *JASB* (N.S.), Vol. XVI, (Numismatic Supplement No. XXIV), pp. 212-20; Syed Ejaz Hussain, 'Coins and Commerce in Bihar in Seventeenth Century: Some Reflections' in Shailendra Bhandari and Sanjay Garg, eds., *Felicitas: Essays in Numismatic, Epigraphy & History in Honour of Joe Cribb*, Mumbai: Reesha Books, 2011, pp. 223-36.

<sup>210</sup> Aziza Hasan, *Mints of Mughal the Empire: A Study in Comparative Currency Output*, PIHC, Vol. 29, 1967, p. 323.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. p. 326.

**Figure-15**

**Mint of Akbar, Patna.**



**Source:** <https://www.marudhararts.com/>

## **Conclusion**

These were some towns, situated in modern Bangladesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, and Jharkhand. Balasore, Rajmahal, and Patna these three towns were well connected culturally and commercially to the contemporary Bengal Subah; above all, these places were much closed to the border of Bengal. Naturally, they performed immensely in the urbanization of Mughal Bengal, and vice-versa. As we can see, the emergence of Dhaka city leads to transforming other neighbouring villages into urban centers. The economy of these villages was depended on agricultural production. Now the scene has been changed; these neighbouring urban places started to collect raw materials and agricultural products from places that were a little far from the central city. The

scenario is almost the same as other towns discussed in this chapter, and that's the process of how the cities were expanded.

The chapter suggests that all the towns and urban centres in Mughal Bengal were emerged based on economic factors. The general urbanization process is the rise of the market and hub area in the towns. The chapter started with the existing urbanization process of the Sultanate period. *Mauza*, *qasba*, *baldah* and *shahar* were the various nomenclatures of Mughal Bengal, which were the developed version of *Muzafaat*, *khittah*, *qasbah*, *iqlim*, *baldah* and *shahr* of the Sultanate period.

As a result of commercial growth, emerging as a mint city, says the town's prosperity. A huge number of mints were constructed in the various towns of Bengal by the Mughals. Such towns were Dhaka, Rajmahal, Hugli, Satgaon, Murshidabad, etc. As Syed Ejaz Hussain mentioned, three types of coin in Rajmahal: two coins in the name of Akbar and one gold coin of Aurangzeb. It suggests the continuous value and prosperity of the city. By the time the Portuguese desired to shift mint to Hugli and later construction of a mint there indicates equal prosperity. And the construction of a well at Malda by a woman named Bonamalti clearly indicates women's involvement in urbanization.

The abundance of commercial goods and materials accelerated the urbanization process. It indicates the growth of agriculture during the contemporary period. The most prominent goods were silk and textiles, which tested great importance to the world. Amongst the various silk production centre especially Kashimbazar was extremely famous. The location of Kasimbazar was very close to Murshidabad. The existence of mint town Murshidabad in a reasonable distance to the famous silk produced centre Kasimbazar was a culturally and economically complementary to each other. On the other hand, as Thomas Bowrey said, Patna was a gate that opened into Bengal and Orissa.



The settlement pattern and professional occupations of the cities of Murshidabad, Dhaka, were identical in every way of life. Dhaka was made the capital city, as an administrative and military headquarter, Dhaka expanded the territory rapidly and its commercial activities increased, Indian, foreign merchants, traders and bankers - Mughals, Pathans, Europeans, Armenians, Turanis, Marwaris and other up-country Hindus were attracted to the place. They required accommodation both for themselves and their goods. In the first part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Dhaka's period of glory came to an end with the shifting of the provincial capital from Dhaka to Murshidabad. The history of Murshidabad city becomes clear from the early years of the eighteenth century when Murshid Quli Khan moved from Dacca to Murshidabad [then Makhsudabad]; but its origin is uncertain. After his arrival at Makhsudabad, he improved the town, raised public offices and other government establishments and changed its name to Murshidabad. The numerous ganjes, bazaars, and *ghats* suggest that all parts of the city were well furnished with daily requirements and had a regular flow of supplies from their extensive hinterland. Commerce with Europeans and Indians made Murshidabad a lucrative destination for migrants and the centre of economic and administrative activities. A mint was set up in 1705, including the beginning of a banking system which was traditionally maintained by mahajans and sarrafs (shroffs) from Rajputana, who travelled with the Mughal army. Families like Jagat Seths carried on business to strengthen their own capital with both the Nawabs and the Europeans. The Seths brought Jainism with them and built several Jain temples in Murshidabad.

The study of towns and urban centers in Mughal Bengal shows that the urban process was in full swing before the arrival of foreign companies in Hindustan. The Mughal dynasty gathered the support of the local corporate structure and gave way to the foreign merchant after reducing the import duties. The emperors, nobility, and service gentry develop a bond with the devotional

network, artisans, and labourers. The towns will be seen as much as places to store and transact information and ideas of hard-edge economic classes and inclusive communities. The relationship created by the indigenous notion of arbitration, by property rights by criminal and civil laws, made the city's idea blurred in Hindustan at that time.

Communication and transportation became a major concern. Along with riverine routes, Mughal emperors, companies, and sometimes the local endeavour constructed land routes to better communication and transportation. In this way, the marginal rural areas could also connect themselves with the main town, and this is a necessary fact of urbanization. Various ganjs in rural and urban places worked as the economic and cultural hinterland of village society. Coinage system was developed in this period, at the initial time of Mughal power in Bengal, only few mint towns existed like Rajmahal. But over time, the number of mint towns increased, for example, Dhaka, Hugli, and Murshidabad. The huge number of coins and their quality can make us believe in the prosperity of Bengal during the period.

There were many towns and urban centres that grew up under the Mughal Rules across the region, but it was very difficult to include all of them in this research. One final problem has not been explicitly touched upon in this chapter. It is the question of the factors that led to the fall of some towns and cities. While general causes of urban growth or relative decline are very difficult to isolate, a systematic inquiry addressed to this problem alone might succeed in at least suggesting the possible range of explanations. The central idea behind this chapter is the complementarity of economic nodality, political attributes, cultural syncretism, which was as much a feature of Bengal towns. Conditions affecting these three vital components of civic life might explain at the same time why historically certain towns of Mughal Bengal rose to prominence while others declined.



## **Chapter-3**

### **Socio-Cultural Transformation**

Every culture possesses the inherent capacity to transform and change itself. No culture could be dead rigid to the extent that it may not be able to accept changes and transformation. If a culture is rigid, one may ask how far the culture is/was rigid and the degree of rigidity. Transformation and change could be from within, and also, there could be external elements that may bring alteration and modification in the characteristics of a given culture. The theory of culture recognizes that ‘cultures are living entities, developed by people; they grew and changed in the past, continue to grow and change today, and will grow and change further in the future. In fact, cultures will never stop growing and evolving. However, some cultures are more amenable to change than others. Therefore the capacity of culture to change differs from one society to another depending on the culture’s ideological core and the civilizational context within which it lives.<sup>212</sup>This country has maintained the dynamics and characteristics of assimilation and transformation from ancient times as far as India is concerned.

After the advent of the Muslims, specifically from the beginning of the thirteenth century, India witnessed a continuous rush of immigrants in the form of ruling elites, nobles, soldiers, religious and learned scholars, and Sufis in various parts of the country, including Bengal. The new ruling class introduced a new system of government, statecraft, sharia, administrative norms,

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<sup>212</sup> Mohamed Rabie, *A Theory of Sustainable Sociocultural and Economic Development*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016 p. 161.

and procedures, which were novel and somewhat defined. This brought deep social and cultural impact on every aspect of economic, social, and cultural life. Throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Turkish rule was simply a military occupation. Still, from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, the delta realized the Perso-Islamic culture in every walk of life, both horizontally and vertically. Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah invited the renowned Persian poet Hafiz Shirazi to Bengal, this weight of a new culture. Hafiz could not be able to visit the province but sent a Persian *ghazal*, and in the couplet of that *ghazal*, he praised the Perso-Islamic culture of India, especially Bengal:

*Shakkar shikan shewand haman tutiyan-i Hind*

*In qand-i Parsi ke ba-Bangalah me rawad*

[How happy in their sugar-pecking these Indian parrots all,  
Who banquet on this Persian candy transmitted to Bengal?]

It was perhaps the warmth of this *ghazal* that appreciated the candy of Bengal that attracted the Kobiguru Rabindranath Tagore, who visited the grave of this great Persian poet when he travelled to Persia in 1932.

But soon, the process of indigenization of the Perso-Islamic culture began. This is well reflected from the reference of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah as the ‘Sultan of the Bengalis’ and the ‘king of Bengal’ in *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi* of Shams Siraj Afif.<sup>213</sup> The process of indigenization was also reflected through architecture, wherein the local art was well adopted and adapted. Sikandar Shah,

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<sup>213</sup>Shams Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*. In *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, (Trans. and ed., H. M. Elliot and John Dowson), Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1964, Vol. 3, pp. 295-96.

who built the famous Adina mosque, was perhaps the first ruler who preferred the local adaptation of art. In this connection, Richard Eaton has remarked, ‘In fact, stylistic motifs in the mosque’s prayer niches reveal the builders’ successful adaptation, and even appreciation, of late Pala-Sena art’.<sup>214</sup> The process of indigenization was furthered by the patronage of the local language i.e., Bengali, and the recruitment of local Bengalis at high posts in the administration during the Sultanate rule. The new immigrants needed settlements and means of livelihood, for which the *iqta* system was introduced. The new rulers were also required to win the support of the local people in order to sustain their rule and absolute authority. Immigration certainly brought about demographic changes in the society that ultimately caused the socio-cultural transformation.

The most significant contribution to the geography of Bengal during the Mughal period was its demographic change which resulted in the transformation of the urban life of the people. The population of Bengalis estimated to be 30 million between 1769 and 1757. Almost the same figure continued before the Great Bengal famine of 1770.<sup>215</sup> Compared to the entire Indian population, that was estimated to be 190 million in 1750,<sup>216</sup> (with Bengal accounting for 16% of its population).

Despite how imperial culture had accommodated itself to North India, Bengal remained for centuries from the Northern part of the country. The Mughals treated the province as a distinctive region. One reason for this isolation is the wet monsoon weather of the delta, of which

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<sup>214</sup>Richard M. Eaton, *Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, p. 42; Naseem Ahmed Banerji, ‘The Mihrabs in the Adina Mosque at Pandua, India: Evidence of the Reuse of Pala-Sena Remains’, (Paper read at the Twenty-first Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison: November 6-8, 1992).

<sup>215</sup>Janam Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal: War, Famine and the End of Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 27.

<sup>216</sup>Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Perilous Passage: Mankind and the Global Ascendancy of Capital*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, p. 145.

North Indian officers posted in Bengal frequently made complaints.<sup>217</sup> Too frequently transfer policy of the Mughal officials compelled the imperial empire officers to regard the delta more as a temporary assignment than a secure adopted home. They comprised soldiers, Marwari merchants, clerks attached to Mughal officers, and several artisans who supplied and equipped the Mughal military administration. As a result, Bengal appeared a colony of outsiders, effectively reversing the long-term pre-Mughal trend whereby the Muslim elite class had progressively accommodated itself into the Bengali climate and cultural environment by entering into marriage with Bengali women.

Akbar's reign and the first eight years of Jahangir's accession were the periods of conquering generals when the province was not yet ready to accept and continue a settled civil government. Though Bengal had been included among the eleven *subahs* to which Akbar in November 1586 sent out orders for setting up his new type of uniform provincial administration, the order took a quarter of a century to be actually enforced. From the time of Jahangir, the Mughal Administration really began its journey in Bengal, especially when Islam Khan succeeded in crushing out the local rebellion that made a regular peaceful rule possible in the province.<sup>218</sup>

During the Mughal period, Bengal witnessed the working of new forces that entirely transformed Bengali life and thought and the influence of which is still felt in the province. During this period, the outer world came to Bengal and Bengal went out to the external world. The social,

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<sup>217</sup> Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, trans., M .I. Borah, Vol. I, Gauhati: Government of Assam, p. 43.

<sup>218</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal: Muslim Period 1200 A.D-1757 A.D.*, Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 2003 (rept.), pp. 334–35.

economic, and cultural transformation that took place during this time had a distinct influence on the evolution of modern Bengal later. Indeed, there has been nothing comparable in our provinces past history except the modernisation we owe to the British influence.<sup>219</sup> The Mughal Emperors did not deliberately inaugurate these forces. Still, the political change that accompanied their conquest and the administration imposed on the conquered land made the triumph of the new forces possible and easy. These two forces were the growth of a vast seaborne trade and the organisation of the Bengal Vaishnava into a sect. Both the literature and the architecture of the particular period reveal the new ruling class as profoundly foreign—because of the non-Bengali character.

### **Migration of Muslims to Mughal Bengal:**

In 1626 an Afghan, Mahmud Balkhi, travelled to Rajmahal and wrote of resisting people whose family origins belong to Balkh, Bukhara, Khurasan, Iraq, Baghdad, Anatolia, Syria, and North India.<sup>220</sup> These would have been the remainder of the predominantly Sunni *ashraf* of Akbar's day when Rajmahal was the provincial and administrable capital. After some years, the poet-official Muhammad Sadiq Isfahani, who stayed in Dhaka from 1629 to his death in 1650, wrote a diary named *Subh-i-Sadiq*, in which he mentions the dozens of artists, poets, administrators, and generals he had come to know in that city. Most of these men were Shias whose ancestors had migrated from distant centres of Persian culture—for example, *Teheran, Ardistan, Mashhad, Isfahan, Qazvin, Taliqan, Mazandaran, Shiraz, Tabriz, Herat, Bukhara, or Gilan*. This

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid. p. 216.

<sup>220</sup> Mahmud B. Amir Wali Balkhi, *The Bahr-ul-Asrar: Travelogue of South Asia*, ed. RiazulIslam, Karachi: University of Karachi, 1980, p. 48.



indicates that between the reign of Akbar (1556–1605), when Rajmahal was the capital city, and that of Shah Jahan (1628–1658), when Dhaka was the capital city, an increasing proportion of Bengal's urban *ashraf*, although emerged in North India, claimed Iranian ancestry.<sup>221</sup> Shah Nimat Allah Firuzpuri (d. 1669), was an *ashraf* Shaikh from the Punjab region who settled down in Malatipur near Malda city early in the reign of Shah Jahan.

A sense of superiority accompanied the Mughals' feeling of alienation from the land to or condescension toward its people. In matters of language, diet, dress, and newly arrived administrators experienced huge differences between Bengal and the culture of North India. The delta's diet of fish and rice, for example, disagreed with many immigrants brought up on wheat and meat, essential to the diet in Punjab. Written in 1786, the *Riyaz-us-Salaṭin* faithfully reflects the *ashraf* perspective regarding Bengali culture and reads almost like a British colonial manual on how to survive amongst the native inhabitants: and the food of the natives of that kingdom, from the higher to the lower, are rice, fish, mustard oil, and fruits and curd, sweetmeats. They also eat plenty of red chili and salt. In many parts of this country, salt is scarce. The natives of this country are of bad tastes, shabby habits, and shabby modes of dress. They do not eat the bread of wheat and barley at all. The meat of goats and fowls and clarified butter do not agree with their systems.<sup>222</sup> Lizzie Collingham pointed out the processes by which the humble *khichri*, a staple of the peasant's diet, was included in the Mughals' royal cuisine, albeit after it was made more

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<sup>221</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol.II, pp. 334–35.

<sup>222</sup> Ghulam Husain Salim, *Riyazu-s-Salat*, trans. Moulavi Abdus Salam, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1902, p. 21.

prosperous and more sophisticated.<sup>223</sup> Scholars of music demonstrated how regional musical traditions were admitted into an evolving practice of Hindustani classical music.<sup>224</sup>

Mughal officers also associated Bengalis with fishers, whom they openly despised. Around 1620, two imperial commanders, aiming to belittle the martial improvement of one of their colleagues, taunted the latter with the words: “Which of the rebellions have you defeated except a group of fishermen who raised a stockade at Ghalwapara” in reply, the other observed that even the Mughals’ most tremendous adversaries in Bengal, ‘Musa Khan, and Isa Khan had been fishermen. “Where shall I find a Dawud son of Sulayman Karrani to fight with, to please you?” he asked rhetorically, and with some annoyance, merging that it was his duty as a Mughal official to subdue all imperial enemies in Bengal, “whether they are *Machwas* (fishermen) or Mughals or Afghans.”<sup>225</sup> In this view, the only genuinely worthy opponents of the Mughal army were state rebels or Afghans like the Bengalis, Karranis; stereotyped as fishermen, were categorised as less worthy adversaries.

Mughal officials thus distinguished themselves from Bengalis as tax-receivers instead of taxpayers and North Indian fighting men instead of docile fishers. On one occasion, Ihtimam Khan, Islam Khan’s chief naval officer, expressed annoyance that the governor had once treated him and his son like natives.<sup>226</sup> Since the Persian term *Ahl-i Hind*, used here, which means simply Indian, one might conceive to find it used only by nobles and elites who had immigrated from beyond

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<sup>223</sup> Gupta, ‘Maharaj Rajballabh Sen’, p. 70. in Kumkum Chatterjee, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal*, Oxford: Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2012, p. 13.

<sup>224</sup> Rao Shulman Subrahmanyam, ‘Textures of Time’, In Kumkum Chatterjee, *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>225</sup> Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, trans. M. I. Borah, Vol.II, Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936, pp. 650–51.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 51.

India, but Ihtimam Khan was himself an India-born Muslim from Punjab;<sup>227</sup> hence his use of the term in a disgraceful sense suggests he had acquired *ashraf* attitudes through his service with the Mughals. That *ashraf* Muslims occupied a social category distinct from the natives was also noted by the Portuguese traveller Sebastian Manrique, who in 1629 described Bengal's population as composed of three groups—the Portuguese, the Moors, and the natives of the country.<sup>228</sup> In this social classification, Muslims were foreigners to the land by definition. From the perspective of the *ashraf* Muslims whom Manrique met, it was conceptually impossible for natives to be Moors—that is, there could be Bengali Muslims.

### **Religious Syncretism:**

Islam and Hinduism, the two disparate religions, came to exist and thrive side by side after the Turks (Muslims) became rulers of Bengal and, indeed, of India. On the one hand, the ancient and tolerant Hindu civilization constituted various elements; on the other, there appeared the dynamic and expansive Islam of Semitic origin, which believes in one God, one Prophet, one scripture, and one empire.

Societal integration is a top priority in Islam as it considers all humanity as a single-family called the *ummah*. For this reason, Islam prohibits intervention in the rituals of other religions and asks to preserve their customs, beliefs, and property. Historically, whenever Muslims ruled, non-Muslims were welcome and enjoyed the right of residence. There are numerous examples of Muslim rulers providing religious freedom to non-Muslims.

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<sup>227</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, op.cit. p.170.

<sup>228</sup> *Travels of Fray Sebastien Manrique 1629-1643*, ed. by S.C.E Luard, & H. Hosten, A Translation of the Itinerario de las Misiones Orientales, 2010, p. 40.

Both Hindus and Muslims have lived together in Barak Surma Valley and Bengal for about 800 years. Islam encroached on Indian lives in three phases: 1. Conflict, 2. Mutual Appreciation, and 3. Assimilation.<sup>229</sup> The third phase of assimilation is most significant in the religious and cultural transformation of Bengal under the Mughal of review. The contemporary vernacular literature suggests that both the Hindus and the Muslims broke down the barriers of religious injunctions and practiced common worship in many cases- such as Pir Worship. It is to be marked that syncretism was visible in Pirism, Sufism, Nathism, Neo-Vaisnavism, Kartabhaja sect, the lifestyle of the Bauls, practices of the scroll painters, etc., and the gamut of Bengali literature, namely Vaisnava literature, *Mangal Kavyas*, translated works, Sufi literature, *Punthi* literature, Pir literature, *Purba Banga Gitika*, *Mymensing Gitika*, *Atharo Bhatir Panchali*, etc. witness syncretism in the Bengali society.

The Bauls and Sahajias are the off-shoots of Sufism in Bengal, and they played an essential role in Hindu-Muslim harmony. The *Bauls* and *Sahajias* were a kind of religious sects that combined Hinduism and Islam principles. One of the famous *Bauls* in Bengal was Lalon Fakir, who used to say that he was neither a Hindu nor a Muslim, and the only religion he believed in was humanism. In one of his songs, he preached that:<sup>230</sup>

*Bhakter dware bandha aachen Sain*

*Hindu ki Jaban bole tar kacche jatir bichar nai.*

*Ek Chande hoi jagat aalo*

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<sup>229</sup> Md. Shah Noorur Rahman, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in Mughal Bengal*, Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2001, p. 48.

<sup>230</sup> S. M. Lutfar Rahman, *Lalan Shah: Jiban O Gan*, (in Bengali – Lalan Shah: His Life and Songs), Dhaka: 1983, p. 113.

*Ek bije shob janma holo.*

[God is ever-present at the door of the devotee, and He does not distinguish caste or creed, or a Hindu and a Muslim. As the same moon lights the world, every living being is also born out of the same Divine Spirit.]

Poet Faizullah (19th century) wrote in his *Satya Pir Panchali*:

*Selam karib aage Pir Niranjan*

*Muhammad Mustafa bondo aar Patanjan.*

*Sher Ali Fatema bondo ekida koriya*

*Hassan Hossain poida hailo jahar lagiya.*

[I shall first of all salute Pir Niranjan and then sing in praise of Muhammad Mustafa and Panjatan. After concentration, I worship Sher Ali and Fatima, for whom Hassan and Hossain were born.]

The same sentiment reflecting the religious and cultural syncretism achieved in Mughal Bengal is also found in the various ballads of the *Purba Banga Gitika* and *Maimansingh Gitika*. In one of the ballads, it has been emphasized that:<sup>231</sup>

*Hendu (Hindu) aar Musalman eki pinder dari*

*Keha bole Allah Rosul keha bole Hari*

*Bismilla aar Cchiribistu ekkei goan*

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<sup>231</sup> Md. Shah Noorur Rahman, *Hindu-Muslim relations in Mughal Bengal*. Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2001, p. 81.

*Dofak kori diye parava Ram Rahiman.*

[The Hindus and Muslims are ropes of the same bundle; someone says Allah Rasul, someone says Hari; Bismillah and Sri Vishnu are the same; when they are made different, they are called Ram and Rahim]

### **Pirism/Sufism:**

The *Pirs* accelerated Hindu-Muslim syncretism in Bengal during the medieval period, including Barak-Surma Valley. Persian word, '*Pir*,' literally means old, but it denotes a "mystic guide" (e.g., *Murshid*, *Shah*, *Sheikh*, or *Usthad*), who initiates disciples (*murids*) into mystic orders. While all *Pirs* are *Sufis*, but all *Sufis* are not *Pirs*. The belief in *Pirs* and devotion to their shrines did not originate in India but were brought from Persia, Afghanistan, and Iraq by the immigrants and their religious orders. On the contrary, in India in general and Bengal in particular, certain factors facilitated the encroachment of saint worship into the Muslim society. The devotion of *Pir* was a form of joint worship of both Hindus and the Muslims in Medieval Bengal. The large settlement of foreign Muslims with the Hindus and the converted Muslims enabled Islam to strike its root deep in society. The worship of local gods and goddesses immensely contributed to it. On the other hand, in 1831, Garcin de Tassy retained the saints to be substituted for the Muslims in the place of the numerous gods of the Hindus. As amongst the saints honoured by the Muslims, some personages acknowledged the beliefs of the Vedas, so several of the Muslim saints of India, are venerated by the Hindus.<sup>232</sup> *Ghazi Vijaya Pir* and *Satya Pir Vijay* of Faizullah (16<sup>th</sup> Century);

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<sup>232</sup> *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, Vol.VI-New Series, London: Parbury, Allen and Co., 1831, p. 354.

*Shasti Mangal*, *Ray Mangal*, *Kamala Mangal* (17th century) of Krishna Das, *Sitala Mangal*, and *Dharma Mangal* of Ruparam all indicate transparently that Bengali Hindus were worshiped to Pirs in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries because the Vaisnavas had lost some of their impressions over the culture, and society at that time. A large number of Hindus began worshipping this pirs as their gods, and their tombs were visited by both Hindus and Muslims alike. Again the pre-existing relationship of the guru-chela of the Hindus was found to be identical to the idea of the *pir-muridi* relationship of Islam. To the converted Muslims, pirs were like the Tantric *gurus* and *dargahs* (shrines), and tombs were like the stupas and Chaitayas of the Buddhists. As a result of Hindu-Muslim cultural implications, worship of numerous pirs originated in Bengal, e.g., Manik Pir, SatyaPir, Bara Khan Ghazi, Kalu Ghazi, and others. An anonymous medieval Bengali poet wrote, “The pirs of the Muslims gradually became the gods of the Hindus. They manifested themselves and were devoted by both the communities.”<sup>233</sup>

So *pir* worship was a remarkable instance of syncretism between the Hindus and the Muslims, and it developed cordial relations between the two communities. Every *pir* belonged to a mystic order. The Muslim devotion to the living *pir* had its counterpart in the Hindu worship of the guru or *gosain*. *Sijdah* (Prostration) of the *murid* (disciple) to the *pir* was comparable to the *Sastanga Pranipath* of the Hindu chela to guru. Orthodox Muslims considered this almost sacrilegious. The *pir* was supposed to possess superpowers: curing diseases, making sterile women conceive, and even reviving the dead to life and causing rain to fall (as Shah Karam Ali of Jagannathpur reportedly did in Tippera).<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Abdul Qadir and Rezaul Karim (ed.), ‘*Kavya Malancha*’, Calcutta: 1945, p.30; Shah Noorur Rahman, ‘Pir Cult as Evidence of Hindu-Muslim Amity in Mughal Bengal’, *Indian History Congress*, 1989, p. 281.

<sup>234</sup> Shah Noorur Rahman, op.cit. p. 281.

Gradually, the purity of the sites of the pirs also spread among the Hindu masses. There is mention of the old famous pirs and hermitages of the pirs of Bengal in the salutations of the various directions (digvandana) in *Chandi Mangal*, *Dharma Mangal*, *Purba Banga Gitika* (East Bengal Ballad), *Manasa Mangal*, *Mymansieng Gitika* (ballad), and other poetic works. In other words, it can be safely exerted that Hindu popular literature had spaced earmarked in Mangal Kavyas for Muslim pirs and the places associated with them. So it is an undeniable sign of Hindu-Muslim syncretism. The opinion of those historians who have drawn a picture of continuous intolerance and oppression during this age is not valid. As a result of the growing impression of pirs on Bengali society, the intensity of the conflict and hostility of the initial Muslim conquest gradually decreased. There would undoubtedly have been no reference to such adoration in popular Hindu religious poems if it had not been so.

At the end of the seventeenth century, a Hindu poet, Sitaram Das, adored the Muslim pirs in the long invitation of his work from the heart's core. This seems to be an outstanding symptom of cultural assimilation. Again, in the early nineteenth century, Faizullah, the author of *Satya Pir Panchali*, has written in the Vandana of his work:

“First of all, I shall salute Pir Niranjan and then sing in praise of Muhammad Mostafa and Panjatan. After concentrating, I worshiped Sher Ali and Fatima, for whom Hassan and Hussain were born. I worship the goddess Sati and other pure women. I worship Rohini, Daibaki, and mother Sachi, who gave birth to Gorachand (Sri Chaitanya). The poet Faizullah dedicated to truth, sings thus.”<sup>235</sup> Here the Muslim poet showed his gratitude for the great personalities, so we can argue that there was an appropriate environment of syncretism in the society. That is why the

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<sup>235</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, ‘Identity and Composite Culture: The Bengal Case’, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, 2013, p. 6.



Muslim poets invited and adored Hindu goddesses in their verses. Otherwise, the poet's voice would have been different.

Sufism is a significant dimension of cultural-religious expression in Islam. Generally, Sufis reached Bengal in the mid-eleventh century<sup>236</sup> and spread such that there was no town or village in Bengal except that a Sufi had settled.<sup>237</sup> Some of the Muslim saints (Sufis) who had come from Arabia and Persia to different parts of Bengal before the foundation of Muslim rule in the region include Shah Sultan Rumi, Baba Adam Shahid, Shah Sultan Mahiswar Mokhdudh Shah Dowla Shahid, and Mokhdum Shah Gajnawi in Netrokona, Bogra, Bikrampur, Pabna, and Bardhaman.<sup>238</sup>

During Medieval Bengal, Sufis contributed significantly to the formation and development of Islamic culture.<sup>239</sup> Sufis introduced various methods and approaches to both Muslims and non-Muslims as well. One of the most general and effective approaches was taken by Sufis, opening a *Langarkhana* (free kitchen for providing food to those in need) in the *khanqah* (the abode of Sufis). All the people belonging to all cultures, religions, and creeds used to visit Khanqahs for their metaphysical healing. This enabled the Sufis to reach ordinary people and advocate their spiritualism.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Al-Masud, A., Abdullah, M. F., & M. R. A Rabbani, 'The contributions of Sufism in promoting Religious harmony in Bangladesh', *Journal of Usuluddin*, Vol. 45, No. 2, 2017, p. 106.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. p. 109.

<sup>238</sup> Abdullah Al-Ahsan, 'Spread of Islam in Pre-Mughal Bengal', *Intellectual Discourse*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1994, p. 46.

<sup>239</sup> A. M. Chowdhury, 'Prachin Banglar Itihas O Sanskriti' (History and culture of ancient Bengal), Banglabazar, 2009. In Mohammad Elius, Issa Khan, Mohd Roslan, Mohd Nor, Abdul Muneem, Fadillah Mansor, and Mohd Yakub, Zulkifli Bin Mohd Yusof, 'Muslim Treatment of Other Religions in Medieval Bengal', *Sage Open*, 2020, p. 10.

<sup>240</sup> A. B. Siddiq, A. Habib, 'The formation of Bengal civilization: A glimpse on the socio-cultural assimilations through political progressions in Bengal Delta', *Artuklu Human and Social Science Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2017, p. 6-7.

Another effective approach by Sufis' was their liberal views, which attracted people of different religions.<sup>241</sup> Sufis proclaimed against religious hatred and fanaticism and worked for unity among the people of Bengal.<sup>242</sup> The majority of scholars consider that Sufis contributed the most toward the Islamization in Bengal. Their interpretation of Islam's complete belief in strict monotheism, human equality, brotherhood, and accountability attracted local people who were simultaneously oppressed and suppressed by the practice of the caste system and strict religious regulations.<sup>243</sup>

In the later period, the role of the Sufis for the development of syncretistic culture between the Hindus and the Muslims was remarkable. The *Bauls* and the *Sahajias* are the off-shoots of Sufism in Bengal. They also played a significant role in peace and harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims in the society of United Bengal. Lalan Faqir is the most famous among the *Bauls*. One of his songs is quoted below for a better understanding of the role of the *Bauls* for assimilation and syncretism in Bengal- "God ever-presents at the door of the devotee, and he does not make any difference of caste and creed, between a Hindu and a Muslim. As the world is lighted by the rays of the moon, so every living being is born out of the same Divine Spirit."<sup>244</sup>

### **The Spread of Vaishnavism:**

During Mughal power, the entire religious life of Bengal was transformed by Vaishnavism. The basic principle of this creed is *bhakti*, or personal worship to God (as Krishna Vasudeva) with an

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<sup>241</sup> M.S.N. Rahman, 'Religious and cultural syncretism in Medieval Bengal', *The NEHU Journal*, Vol.XVI, No.1, 2018, p. 61.

<sup>242</sup> Al-Masud, et.al. p. 117.

<sup>243</sup> Md. Shah Noorur Rahman, 'Religious and Cultural Syncretism in Medieval Bengal', *The NEHU Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January - June 2018, p. 61.

<sup>244</sup> S. N. Lutfur Rahman, "*Lalan Shah Yiban o Gan*", Dacca, 1983, p.113. In Shah Noorur Rahman, Religious and Cultural Syncretism in Medieval Bengal, *The NEHU Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, January - June 2018, p. 61.

intensity of emotion similar to conjugal love. Its theory had been known long before and in other parts of India too. But Chaitanya (1486-1533), by his teaching, made it a reality to the masses of Bengal and Orissa. He, however, did not find a church. His spiritual influence would have ended with the death of the last of his personal disciples. He would have been dimly remembered as one of the thousands of God-intoxicated sadhus of India who had inspired and elevated through the ages their respective generations and then passed into the mists of oblivion. Such would have been the history of Jesus Christ but for Paul and Peter, who created a Church and theology after the death of their master.<sup>245</sup>

The permanence of Bengali Vaishnavism is due to the organisation of a sect- its ritual, its rules of life, its discipline, and its financial basis, by Nityanand and the creation of a special theology by the Seven Fathers of the Church (Sapta-Goswami). They gave fixity and material form to the pure light that had emanated from the lips of their master. However, as understood in Christian Europe, the word Church is inapplicable to the countless loose groups of local sub-sects comprehended under the general name of Vaishnavas in Bengal, whose sole bond of union is a common spiritual heritage and differentiation from all other sects in the land. But despite this lack of disciplined organisation and control by a hierarchy of priests acting under one common supreme pontiff, the new religion of Chaitanya has made Bengali Hindu society what it is today.<sup>246</sup>

The moral reformation of the upper and middle classes has been the work of Vaishnavism in uplifting the lower ranks of society and the illiterate masses by carrying religion to their doors through the device of *Nam-sankirtan* or chanting processions- which is spoken of as the unique contribution of Chaitanya to the spiritual life of the modern age. The new creed, like Methodism

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<sup>245</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, op-cit. pp. 220.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

in England, born two centuries later, has opened a new life of knowledge and spirituality to the lower castes. Under its life-giving touch, they have produced many Vaishnava saints and poets, scholars, and leaders of thought. This was impossible in the old days of orthodox Brahmanic dominion over society. Thus Vaishnavism has proved the saviour of the poor; it has proclaimed the dignity of every man as possessing within himself a particle of the divine soul (Jiv-Atma).<sup>247</sup> Sanskrit literature is the root of our general culture, no less than theology, throughout Hindu India. This creed during the Mughal age is a revived and widespread study of Sanskrit among all castes and created new Bengali literature with a marked popular appeal. It has enlivened and sweetened Bengal's intellectual life, no less than the spiritual, and significantly broadened the basis of our culture. The Vaishnava leaders were passionate collectors of Sanskrit manuscripts from the other parts of India.<sup>248</sup>

The educative effect of this creed was helped and enhanced by the pilgrimages from Bengal to Jagannath Puri and Mathura-Vrindaban, which became extensively popular with the establishment of Mughal peace, and which brought Bengal into close contact with the life and thought developed in the heart of the rich empire, at the capital cities of Benares and Allahabad, Agra, and Delhi. Vrindaban became a cultural colony of greater Bengal. In short, Vaishnavism is our abiding gift to Orissa and Assam.

The spirit of the new Vaishnavism had the closest affinity to the dreamy and emotional Bengali character and intensified these natural tendencies of our race. Wherever it spread, it generated a deeply felt tenderness for children and the weak, which gave a new tinge altogether to our domestic life and popular literature. Except in the form of dry logic and barren philosophical wrangling,

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid. pp. 221.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. pp. 222.

Sanskrit learning had significantly been crippled in Bengal by the disappearance of court patronage. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, it greatly revived under the influence of Vaishnavism; but this renaissance was the people's work.<sup>249</sup>

### **Changes in Muslim Society:**

Islam in Bengal, too, experienced new birth in consequence of the Mughal conquest. Apart from the highly cultured subahdars and generals- some of them of the royal blood and some intimately connected with the emperor - and learned chancellors and secretaries, who were deputed to Bengal in regular official succession and who brought into the local Muslim society the fresh breath of a higher culture from the imperial capital,- number of scholarly Muslims from upper India made their homes in this rich province after it had become a permanent and well-administered part of the Empire of Delhi. The significant increase of oceanic communication between Bengal and the western lands due to the vast expansion of India's sea-borne trade in the middle 17<sup>th</sup> century tempted cultured Shias of Persia- scholars, physicians, traders- to come and settle in Bengal.<sup>250</sup>

Wandering saints and preachers had been used to visiting Bengal long before the Mughal conquest. But this stream became ampler in volume after the province's annexation to the Empire of Delhi. In the wake of the officials and troops who marched from the west to the east regularly once every three or four years came religious teachers, Sufi philosophers, and religious mendicants calling themselves *darvishes*, and *auliyas*. The wealth of this province- "hell well-stocked with

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid. pp. 223.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. pp. 224.

bread,” *duzakhpuraznan*, - also attracted from abroad passed scholars in Arabic in search of some less crowded market for their talents. Muslim society in Bengal derived full advantage from this infusion of fresh light from the west. What the Vaishnava religion did for the Hindus of Bengal was done for their Muslim neighbours by the Mughal conquest; this province was intimately joined to the general religious and cultural movements of the rest of India; its narrow isolation was broken.<sup>251</sup>

### ***Ashraf and Ajlaf:***

It is commonly believed that Muslims in India are divided into two distinct strata, the *ashraf*, and *ajlaf*, which are distinguished by ethnic origin and descent. The *ashraf*, or the upper class, include all undoubted descendants of foreign Muslims (Arabs, Persians, and Afghans, etc.) and converts from the upper caste of Hindus. Like the higher Hindu castes, they considered it is degrading to engage in menial occupations or handle the plough, and they looked down upon all other Muslims they called *ajlaf*. These include the various functional castes such as the weavers, cotton-carders, oil-pressers, barbers, tailors, etc., and the converts of originally humble castes.<sup>252</sup> Gait suggests that the distinction between *ashraf* and *ajlaf* corresponds closely to the Hindu division of the community into *dwijas*, or castes of twice-born rank, which comprised the various classes of the Aryan invaders and the Sudras or aborigines whom they subdued.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid. pp. 225.

<sup>252</sup> R Levy, '*Social Structure of Islam*', Cambridge, 1961, p 73. In Imtiaz Ahmad, The Ashraf and Ajlaf Categories in Indo-Muslim Society, *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 9, NO. 19, 1967, pp. 887.

<sup>253</sup> E. A Gait, '*Census of India*' 1901: Bengal Report Vol. 6, No. 1, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1902, p 439.

Marion Smith described the arrangement of the social classes of Alankar village of East Bengal (now Bangladesh). She mentioned that eight groups among the Muslims exist in the village, viz. *Soyod, Sekh, Choudhury, Mogul, Fartan (Pathan), Mazumder, Gulam, and Maimal*. The first six groups consist primarily of landowners and those who engage in trade. The last two groups seem to be distinguished from the first six by occupation and by practical endogamy.<sup>254</sup> Similarly, *Ashraf-Ajlaf* differentiation has been visible in the larger Comillathana of Bangladesh. There are two categories of caste: low ranked, such as washer's man, sweepers, butchers (*Kasai*), and barbers (*hajjams*). The other is known by names or titles commonly associated with lineages and homesteads in the villages. The groups with titles are considered as higher in rank, who are a) *Majumder, Choudhuri, Bhuiya, Kaji, Munsii*, etc. (traditionally high titles or names associated with the landed aristocracy, etc.), b) *Khondakar, Haji, Maulana, Pharaji* (religious groups) c) *Kabiraj, Kathmistri, Imam Molla*, etc. (associated with specific occupation or service, i.e., artisan) d) *Mal, Pagali*, etc. (personal characteristics remembered by family for some reason).<sup>255</sup> A.K.Nazmul Karim classified the Bengal Muslims into Ashraf or Sharif, *AtrafBhalamanus* (rising Muslim middle class), *Atraf*, and *Arzal*. *Ashraf* consisted of persons with actual and supposed foreign origins and regarded as nobles. *Ajlaf* consists of all other Muslims, including various functional groups like *Jolaha* or weaver, *Kalu* or oil-presser, *Dhunia* or cotton-carder, *Hajjam* or barber, *Nikari/Mahimal* or fisherman, etc. and converts of lower rank.<sup>256</sup> So it is clear that Muslim society in India is not egalitarian rather a heterogeneous society.

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<sup>254</sup> A.K Najmul Karim, '*Changing Society in India and Pakistan: A Study in Social Change and Social Stratification*', London: Oxford University Press, 1956, pp. 156-57; Mahmudul Hasan Laskar, '*Caste Stratification among Muslims and Status of Muslim Fishermen Community of Cachar*', *Asia Pacific Journals*, Volume 4, Issue 3, 2018, p. 4.

<sup>255</sup> Mahmudul Hasan Laskar, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>256</sup> A.K Najmul Karim, op.cit. Mahmudul Hasan Laskar, op.cit., p. 5.

Islamic philosophy of equality attracted a more extensive section of low caste Hindus but was unable to accommodate them in the equal social fraternity. Subsequently, the tendency of differentiation between foreign-born Muslims and indigenous local converted Muslims emerged in Muslim society. In fact, local indigenous converts mostly retained their occupations, traditions, and customs even after embracing Islam. So the distinction is mainly between foreign-born or descendent of foreign Muslims and the indigenous converts. Thus the Muslim society as it actually operates contradicts the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet, which have recommended for social equality and denounced any form of distinction in practice. The distinction and differentiation in Muslim society in the Indian sub-continent are due to its long-enduring and pre-existing traditions.<sup>257</sup>

Bengali Islam has its own cultural distinctiveness. In comparison with other parts of India, Islam came late to this region, and by the time it did, it was mainly through processes of filtration and infiltration that it happened. Because Bengalis were usually converted from Hinduism, their Islam has been more liberal and tolerant of unorthodoxy than that of north-western India. A direct reinforcement of that liberalism took place because Islam came to Bengal largely through the activities of the Sufis, who taught an esoteric way of approaching the faith. Sufism had certain philosophical notions in common with the Vedanta of Hinduism and similarities with Vedanta in its methods. These two characteristics combined to produce liberalism in the Muslim Bengali philosophical approach, reinforced by centripetal features of Bengali identity, which held Bengali culture together in spite of religious differences.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Mahmudul Hasan Laskar, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

<sup>258</sup> Denis Wright, 'Islam and Bangladeshi polity', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 1987, pp. 15.



It is noted that 'Bengali Muslims of the Barak Valley are divided into various groups, status-groups or castes, and economic classes. Most of them are converts from local Hindu castes.<sup>259</sup> The different groups are *Syed, Choudhury, Talukdar, Mazumder, Laskar, Barbhuiya*, and *Mazarbhuiya* occupied the higher status, among whom *Sayed* in the top position. The Choudhuries occupy the following position because of their supposed blood purity and economic power due to land ownership.

### **Transformation of Other Culture:**

During the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, state-sponsored mosques' built-in native style expanded in deltaic Bengal. The Muslim court lent enthusiastic support to the Bengali language and literature during this period. In the early fifteenth century, the Chinese traveller Ma Huan observed that Bengali was the language in universal use.<sup>260</sup> In fact, the court began patronising Bengali literary works in a wide range in the late fifteenth century. Under the patronage of Sultan Ruknuddin Barbak (1459-74), Maladhar Basu wrote *Sri Krishna Vijaya*. Again *Manasa Vijaya* by Bipradas, and *Krishna-Mangala* by Jasoraj Khan, and *Padma-Purana* by Vijay Gupta were composed during the reign of Alauddin Husain Shah (1493-1519) and Nasiruddin Nasarat Shah (1519-32). Bijoy Pandit and Kabindra Parameswara translated some portions of the *Mahabharata* from Sanskrit during this period.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Bokth Humayun, 'Muslim Fishermen in North-East India: A Sociological Study', *Research Journal Of Language, Literature and Humanities*, Vol. 1, no. 8, 2014, pp. 2-3.

<sup>260</sup> Rockhill, "Notes on the Relations", p.437, quoted in Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, p. 66.

<sup>261</sup> Nihar Ranjan Ray, 'Medieval Bengali Culture', *Visva Bharati Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No.2, 1945, p. 54.

This is the evidence from the observation of Sebastian Manrique, who visited Bengal in 1629, that Bengal had already developed a syncretic culture by the time the Mughals had established their authority there. He stated that some of the Muslim kings had been in the habit of sending someone for water from *Ganga Sagar* (a holy place where the river Ganges flows into the sea). During the ceremonies connected with their installations, these kings would wash in that sacred water like the previous Hindu sovereigns of Bengal.<sup>262</sup> Thus, the last Bengal Sultans, significantly of the restored Iliyas Shahi dynasty and its successors, evolved a stable, mainly secular, *modus vivendi* with Bengali society and culture. The state systematically patronised the culture of the subject population.<sup>263</sup> They produced so much in their public architecture to the Bengali conceptions of form and medium that prompted Percy Brown to comment the country, initially possessed by the invaders, now included them.<sup>264</sup>

The Bengal, during the time of the Sultanate and Mughal, had a significant role in the society where many of the Muslim leaders worked hard to balance the diversity of religions and cultures. The Muslim leaders left some exemplary works during their time to maintain harmony and peace in the multi-religious and cultural society. Like the Muslim rulers during the Sultanate period, the Mughal rulers were also being kind and welcoming to everyone regardless of their religion and identity. The non-Muslims hold higher ranks and positions in the governance and administration of the Mughal rulers. Place like *dewan* (the chief revenue officer) and advisory council member was given to the non-Muslims.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Sebastian Manrique, *Travels of Manrique, 1629-1643*, Trans. E. Luard and H. Hosten, Vol. 1, Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1927, p. 77.

<sup>263</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>264</sup> Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Muslim Period*, 5th edition, Bombay: 1968, p. 38.

<sup>265</sup> Mohammad Elius, et.al, p. 11.

Again, it should be noted that with the advent of the Mughals, there were fundamental changes in the region's economic structures and its socio-political system and cultural complexion, both at the court and in the countryside. For example, Mughal administrators in Bengal preferred Ayurveda medical therapy to the Yunani medical system inherited by classical Islamic civilization. Thus we find that *subadar* Islam Khan, an Indian Muslim, asked for an Indian physician when he was on his deathbed.<sup>266</sup> Again, when most of the body of the governor-general of Bihar was paralyzed because of an illness, Emperor Jahangir sent two Indian physicians for his treatment.<sup>267</sup> Similarly, when Mirza Nathan, the former Mughal general in Bengal, fell ill, his advisors sent for a *kabiraj* who treated him successfully by recommending the appropriate astrological signs and administering a poisonous brew dissolved in lemon juice and ginger.<sup>268</sup> Such dependence on Ayurveda treatment, even at the cost of neglecting the Yunani system, clarifies how thoroughly Indian values had encroached on the Mughal culture, thus highlighting the cultural and social syncretism in Mughal Bengal by the early seventeenth century.

Thus, amid dramatic socio-economic changes occurring in Mughal Bengal, Islam creatively evolved into an ideology of world construction, forest clearing, and agricultural expansion. On the one hand, Islamic institutions proved themselves sufficiently flexible enough to accommodate the non-Brahmonized religious culture already present in Bengal. On the other hand, the spiritual and cultural traditions already present in Mughal made accommodations with the amalgam of rites, rituals, and beliefs associated with the village mosques and shrines then proliferating in their midst. Moreover, in the corpus of medieval Bengali literature, celebrating

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<sup>266</sup> Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i- Ghaybi*, Trans. M. I. Borah, Vol. I, Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936, p. 256.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p. 262.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, pp. 323-24.

indigenous deities such as *Chandi*, *Manasa*, *SatyaPir*, *dharma*, *Dakshin ray*, etc., local cosmologies are expanding to accommodate new superhuman beings introduced by foreign Muslims.<sup>269</sup> As Richard M. Eaton rightly observes: In the process, Islamic and Bengali worldviews and cosmologies fused in dynamic and creative ways.<sup>270</sup>

That the mixed culture and religious harmony between these two communities, especially among the masses in the rural areas, was a salient feature of pre-modern Bengal and reached a high watermark during the eighteenth century is very much evident from several literary sources, despite the discordant notes on this subject from several historians. In the mid-eighteenth century, S. C. Hill first propounded the theory that there was a vertical division in Bengali society on communal lines - between the Hindus and Muslims. He asserted that the majority of Hindus were oppressed by the Muslim rulers and eager to get rid of the Muslim nawab and invited the British as their saviours.<sup>271</sup> Strangely, the thesis of a communal divide has held ground for so long even though most of the high-ranked officers and zamindars during Alivardi's time – and for that matter during Sirajuddaullah's time, too - were Hindus.<sup>272</sup>

In fact, cultural syncretism reached its culmination point around the mid-eighteenth century. This is evidence that even Prince Azim-us-Shan, Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's grandson and the *subahdar* of Bengal in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, took part in the Holi festival in Dhaka. Nawab Sahamat Jung (Nawazish Muhammed Khan) and Saulat Jung, who

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<sup>269</sup> M. R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal (1494-1538 A.D.)*, Dacca: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1965, pp. 17-18, 164-66,

<sup>270</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, p. 267.

<sup>271</sup> S. C. Hill, *Bengal in 1756-1757*, Vol. 1, London: John Murray, 1905, p. xx.

<sup>272</sup> Sushil Chaudhury, *The Prelude to Empire: Plassey Revolution of 1757*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000, pp. 64-65.

came from Patna, celebrated the Holi festival for seven days at the former's palace garden, Motijheel garden of the former's palace Murshidabad.<sup>273</sup>

Like all other periods, the highest-ranking people were the richest and lived a luxurious life. The middle class was constituted mainly of traders, merchants, bankers, business people, and physicians. This middle-class person generally led moderate and straightforward lives. Mainly the cultivators and handcrafters constituted the base of the society. They often struggled with the hardships caused by floods, famine, and other natural calamities, albeit there were initiatives from the state.<sup>274</sup> On the other hand, the relationship between different religious groups was harmonious and cordial. It is undisputed that the cultural unity during medieval rules, especially in the Mughal period, was the most remarkable success Bengal Delta experienced.

### **Architecture:**

The Mughal architecture style in the Indian subcontinent developed over a period of 300 years. During this period, each architectural project was characterised by its strength, made elegant and graceful by the rich and decorative work, reflecting many syncretic elements from the diverse Indian culture. Asher demonstrates how Bengal's vernacular architectural style became an element in Mughal architecture following the region's conquest in the later sixteenth century. They produced so much in their public architecture to the Bengali conceptions of form and medium that Percy Brown commented, "The country, originally possessed by the invaders, now possessed them."<sup>275</sup> In Bengal, for example, the local rulers had developed a roof that was designed to

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<sup>273</sup> Karam Ali, *Muzaffarnamah*. In J. N. Sarkar, tr, and ed., *Bengal Nawabs*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1952, p. 49.

<sup>274</sup> B. B. Chaudhuri, *Peasant history of late precolonial and colonial India*, Vol. VIII, Delhi: Pearson Education India, 2008, p. 234.

<sup>275</sup> Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture: Muslim Period*, 5th edition, Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala, 1968, p. 38.

resemble a thatched hut. The Mughals liked this “Bangla dome” so much that they used it in their architecture.

Bengali Islamic architecture since long had overwhelmed a marked regional character. It was begun with a well-established Islamic style in Bengal, illustrated by various monuments constructed during the previous time of Mughal authority there. Amongst these are the double-aisled six-domed mosque in Kusumba built-in 1558-59; and the tomb of Pir Bahram, a square-plan single-domed in Burdwan, dated 1562-63. The former one is an instance of being stone-faced, while the latter is brick-constructed and both, like the most pre-Mughal architecture of Islamic Bengal, possessed a prominent curved cornice. Even the ornamental brick's plan and elevation reflect several centuries-old forms. From this foundation, the Mughal architectural style of Bengal during Akbar had evolved.

The oldest surviving architectural record of the new arena is the Kherua mosque, built-in 1582 by chief members of the *Qaqshal* clan in Sherpur, southern Bogra. Although the *Qaqshals* had joined in the Mughal conquest of 1574, six years later, they spearheaded the *manşabdars*' revolt against Akbar's authority, in the midst of which they patronised the construction of this monument. But the alienation of *Qaqshals* from North India was much political, not cultural. Unlike the Afghans before them, they had not been in the province long enough to imbibe the local culture fully, which probably explains the mosque's somewhat hybrid or foreign nature. Its brick outward, engaged corner pinnacle, and curved cornice were all staple indicators of the native Bengali mosque. It had amplified for over a century under the patronage of the Bengal sultanate.

On the other hand, its ground plan was a single-aisle rectangle divided into three bays- had been very popular in the Delhi region since the fifteenth century; beginning with this mosque, it would become a special characteristic feature of the Mughal style in Bengal. Moreover, the building's inscription was in Persian, the royal language of the Mughals, whereas most pre-Mughal Muslim inscriptions in Bengal had been written in Arabic. Thus the mosque aptly reflects the culturally ambiguous position of its patrons, with one foot in Bengal, the other still in Delhi.

More emphatically North Indian, and therefore from a Bengali perspective more foreign, is the conventional mosque of Rajmahal, constructed during the governorship of Raja Man Singh (1594–05) as the principal mosque of Akbar's provincial capital city, this imposing structure (252 × 212 feet) was an architectural requirement of the Mughals' claim to the province. In no other provincial capital during this period was such a large mosque built.<sup>276</sup> In it, we find Akbar's characteristic architectural signatures as already articulated in the imperial capital at Fatehpur Sikri (1570): a high monumental gateway, a single-aisle plane, the ornamentation on the façade, battlements around the outwards, and a division of the bays into two stories, each containing chambers.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204-1760*, p. 171.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

**Figure-16**

**Satgumbad Mosque, Dhaka, 1664–76**



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=Satgumbad+Mosque,+Dhaka>.

It was in Dhaka, however, that the royal style was most expensively indulged in reversing a Bengali architectural tradition patronised by centuries of Muslim rulers. Mughal emperors raised buildings here that were virtual replacements from the North Indian heartland. The Bara Kutra (1644) was typical, a huge public house that once contained shops, chambers, and an imposing multi-storeyed southern gate with an octagonal central room.<sup>278</sup> Although the Bara Kutra is now ruined, several splendid mosques from the period have survived, insignificant the Satgumbad mosque (ca. 1664–76) and the mosques of Haji Khwaja Shahbaz (1679) and Khan Muhammad

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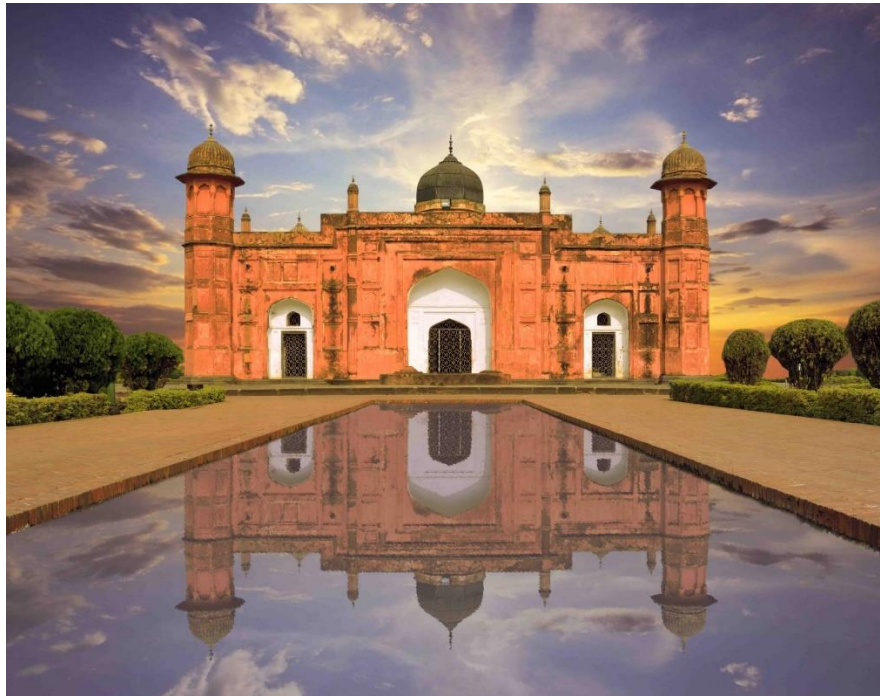
<sup>278</sup> Ibid. p. 55.



Mirza (1704). With their battlements, cusped entrance arches, and, especially in the Satgumbad mosque, increased articulation of exterior and interior surfaces, projecting corner turrets with pavilions, these monuments firmly established in Bengal the aesthetic vision of Mughal imperialism. In the handsome ensemble of gardens and monuments in Dhaka's Lalbagh Fort. This complex includes a mosque, a tomb, an audience hallroom (*Diwan-i Khas*), a tank, a bath, and a walled encirclement with gates.<sup>279</sup> Standing within Lalbagh, one easily recalls the great palace-garden complexes of the imperial heartland- at Lahore, Delhi, and Agra- and realises that this could only have been conceived and built by outsiders to Bengal. None of the elements of the complex is indigenous to the delta.

**Figure-17**

**Lalbagh Fort, Dhaka. Foreground: Fountains and tomb of Bibi Pari (1649)**



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=Lalbagh+Fort%2C+Dhaka>.

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<sup>279</sup> All the mosques, dated 1649, were built between 1678 and 1684. Ibid, pp. 200–201.

The centralization of Mughal power in Dhaka also drove remnants of Bengal's pre-Mughal Muslim political culture into the hinterland. One can see this most clearly in the Atiya mosque in Mymensingh District. Built-in 1609 by Afghan patrons, this mosque, with its complex terracotta façade, ringed corner towers, and the curved cornice, is a highly evolved reformation of the sultanate style, now rusticated to the interior. Architecturally, it would seem to have been the last part of the old order, soon to be submerged under the Mughal stream. Yet, one should not overstate the notion of a monolithic Mughal architectural style expanding inevitably from its North Indian heartlands as a new region was annexed. Even as the old, Bengali style of the mosque was rusticated into the hinterland after the Mughal intrusion into the delta, some aspects of the indigenous style, especially the sharply curved cornice—were included in the Mughal tradition and subsequently surfaced in the imperial capitals of Delhi and Lahore. Thus the evolution of the Mughal architectural culture shows a certain double movement. Reflecting the foundation of central authority on the periphery, a new style moved outward from the centre to the provinces. Yet, features associated with the regions were simultaneously appropriated by the royal centre and absorbed into a unique, composite style, reflecting the assimilation of the periphery into the centre. This model of cultural assimilation, expansion, and feedback are reflected here in architecture- closely paralleled the expansion of Islam as a religious system in Bengal.

**Figure-18**

**Atiya Mosque, Mymensingh District (1609)**



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=Atiya+Mosque,+Mymensingh+District>.

A cluster of formal policy measures represented the p implementation of this ideology under Akbar. Despite erosions from the reign of Shah Jahan, these were continued through the reigns of his two immediate successors. In the years of his reign, Akbar abolished discriminatory taxes Hindus (i.e., the tax levied on Hindus traveling to pilgrims attending festivals and the *jizya* tax, a graduated property that permitted the construction of new temples and t of existing ones.<sup>280</sup>

Artistic representations from the Mughal Bengal (both in sculpture and otherwise) provide further confirmative testimony. The terracotta dashboards on the Bishnupur temples built mainly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also signal separation of sorts between the

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<sup>280</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, 'Goddess encounters: Mughals, Monsters and the Goddess in Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 5, 2013, p. 1476.

public/secular and the domestic and religious spheres, as it were. In panels depicting various court scenes, many of the Hindu as well as Muslim male figures- presumably the aristocracy and royalty- are shown wearing the stuff that had become standard, formal, courtly attire for men- Hindus as well as Muslims- in most regions of India with a history of not just Mughal rule, but the Muslim rule. These figures are dressed in tight-fitting clothes, ankle-length trousers, long tunics belted at the waist, and turbans.<sup>281</sup> In panels not depicting court scenarios but instead depicting, for instance, sets of Vaishnava devotional via music and dance, male figures are dressed slide differently. They are depicted as bare-bodied, wearing dhotis, and sometimes with a *chadar* around their shoulders.<sup>282</sup> In the remarkable collection of *paata-chitras* (manuscripts, painted wooden covers) produced in Bishnupur during the same period, there is a painting said to depict the king and queen of Bishnupur. The royal pair is depicted as devoted Vaishnavas, which of course, they purported to be. Here the king does not wear trousers, tunics, or a turban; instead, he is dhoti-clad and bare-headed.<sup>283</sup>

The city of Bishnupur is now part of the Bankura District of West Bengal. As its name suggests, the city was dedicated to the Hindu god, Vishnu (Bishnu in Bengali). After the Malla king Bir Hambir embraced Gaudiya Vaishnavism in the sixteenth century, the major terracotta temples to the various forms of Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, started proliferating, making the city

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<sup>281</sup> This kind of attire became standard for male gentry into the nineteenth century. Well-known portraits of Raja Rammohan Roy, Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, and others show them dressed in this way.

<sup>282</sup> These remarks are based on observation of sculpture panels on the well-known terracotta temples at Bishnupur, West Bengal. Art-historical studies of these temples include Chittaranjan Dasgupta, 'Bharater Shilpa-Sanskritir Patabhumikaye BishnupurerMandir Terrakota', Bishnupur, 1407 BS. In Kumkum Chatterjee, *Mughal Culture and Persianization in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Bengal*, Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2012, p. 236.

<sup>283</sup> This statement is based generally on an observation of the paata-chitras in the possession of the Jogesh Chandra Roy Bidyanidhi Purakriti Bhaban, Bishnupur, West Bengal. The specific paata-chitra referred to here was produced at Bishnupur, and is subsequently in the possession of the Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta University. Kumkum Chatterjee, op.cit.

the heritage site that it is today. At this time Bishnupur was part of the Mughal Empire, and historians such as Kumkum Chatterjee have highlighted the blend of Hindu Vaishnavism and Mughal influences that the city exhibits. For Chatterjee, the small eastern kingdom of Bishnupur provides an important example of Mughal cosmopolitanism, one that is often overlooked in favour of cities in northern India.

**Figure-19**

**Shyamrai Temple, Bishnupur**



Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=Shyamrai+Temple%2C+Bishnupur&rlz=1C1CHBD>.

**Food Culture:**

The geographical and cultural space – such as it was – was also home to various ‘sub-cultures. At the same time, it interacted with various cultures and geographical zones through political relations, trade, and cultural exchange. The Indo-Persian acumen, which was a significant

aspect of Mughal culture and polity.<sup>284</sup> This covered a large and diverse geographical zone in South Asia, Iran, and Central Asia. Persian-speaking elites shared a common linguistic heritage that became a vehicle for cultural intercourse. This makes a clear-cut definition of culture and what constitutes the ‘*transcultural*’, complicated. In this dissertation, I will, at various points, discuss how food cultures interacted, and this requires some explanation.

As late as 1889, George Watts’s records in his *Dictionary of the Economic Products of India* those natives are beginning to appreciate the fruit. However, the plant is still chiefly cultivated for the people of Europe. Bengalis and Burmese use it in their sour curries.<sup>285</sup> The *alu* listed as a *kharif* crop (autumn harvest) in the *Kitab-i Zirat* – an Indo-Persian agricultural manual dated 1796-97 – may have referred to the white potato.<sup>286</sup> There is also a detailed description of the emerging potato culture in Bengal [Berhampore or Baharampur, 1797], given by the Rev. William Tennant in his *Indian Recreations*.<sup>287</sup> Tennant’s account provides a mixed picture of the potato’s acclimatization: In this district, we have first to notice the culture of Potatoes, which has been introduced into Bengal, and apparently with the most beneficial effect. It is a comfortable circumstance that superstition in Hindostan, all-powerful as it is, does not shut up every avenue to improvement or preclude the people from every advantage to be derived from the superior attainments of Europeans in industry, art, and science. No prejudice prevents the Hindu from the culture and use of the potato: the most valuable and nutritious of all vegetables in every country where its growing is fully understood. If the natives here have hitherto derived but small benefit

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<sup>284</sup> Divya Narayanan, *Cultures of Food and Gastronomy in Mughal and post-Mughal India*, A Dissertation submitted to Heidelberg University, Heidelberg: 2015, p. 16.

<sup>285</sup> George Watt, *A Dictionary of the Economic Products of India*, Vol. V, 1891, p. 100.

<sup>286</sup> Divya Narayanan, *op.cit.* p. 120.

<sup>287</sup> William Tennant, *Indian Recreations: Consisting Chiefly of Strictures on the Domestic Economy of the Mahomeddians and Hindoos*, Vol. II, Edinburgh: C. Stewert, 1803, pp. 45-51.

from this plant, it is because the culture has not become universal, nor has the method of preserving it been so much attended to as in Europe.<sup>288</sup>

Later in the twentieth century, the sequence had been continued. The book *Gora*, written by Rabindranath Tagore, ends on a triumphant note when Gora begins to accept the broader identity of universal humanism, which Tagore himself was acquiring. Symbolically, it is to Paresh Babu, the most sympathetic to Brahmo in the book that Gora discloses: "Today I am free ...today I am really an Indian. In me, there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Muslim, and Christian. Today every caste in India is my caste; the food of all is my food."<sup>289</sup>

### **Historicizing Transgression:**

For the most part, existing literature depicts Mughal rule in Bengal (including its lineal descendant, the state founded by the *nawabs* of Murshidabad) as a violent, oppressive, "foreign" regime that exploited the region materially.<sup>290</sup> Sir J. N. Sarkar's famous tribute to the blessings conferred on Bengal by Mughal rule is well known. But even Sarkar agreed that the positive benefits were accidental by-products rather than the deliberate results of Mughal policy.<sup>291</sup> The picture that emerges of the Mughal state in Bengal is essentially that of a ruthless military-cum-revenue-extracting apparatus that oppressed the region's rajas and zamindars. The cultural dimension of the Mughal presence in Bengal usually gets overlooked and neglected in this literature. After all, what cultural legacy could be associated with alien revenue-extracting

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<sup>288</sup> William Tennant, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>289</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1924, pp. 405-6.

<sup>290</sup> Anjali Chatterjee, *Bengal in the reign of Aurangzeb, 1658-1707*. Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1967, p. 249.

<sup>291</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, pp. 216-28.

machinery? The following segment seeks to modify this received picture and illustrate the salience of a Persianised Mughal political culture in Bengal, particularly among the aristocracy and gentry of the region.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were turbulent periods in the history of Bengal and, more generally, in large parts of eastern India. The Mughal conquest of Bengal in the late sixteenth century was a checkered and uneven process. Much of the seventeenth century was taken up by arduous Mughal efforts to consolidate their power over this region. The political costs of integration into the Mughal system were felt foremost by the rajas and chieftains of the area. They had enjoyed considerable latitude during the last days of Afghan hegemony in Bengal. They managed to be a thorn in the side of the Mughals as long as they could, but eventually, they succumbed to Mughal military might.<sup>292</sup> The reminiscences of Mirza Nathan, a military official who participated in the Mughal campaigns against refractory zamindars in the eastern part of Bengal during the later seventeenth century, are a revealing testament to the violence and terror unleashed by the imperial military machine in these parts. The destruction of Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore, one of the *Barabhuiyans* of Bengal- an event that forms the final segment of the *Annada Mangal*-is testimony to this process. The eighteenth-century turned out to be no less eventful for the region. The weakening of Mughal central authority encouraged the emergence of regional states in different parts of India. In eastern India (Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa), MurshidQuli Khan became the architect of a Mughal successor state that was autonomous for all practical purposes but claimed political and ideological affiliation with the imperial centre at Delhi. The brief tenure of this regime was marked by considerable turbulence, too: several political coups, a series of devastating and destructive raids carried out by the Maratha *Bargis* in the 1740s and rebellions

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.



among the Afghan soldiers of the nawab's army in 1745 and 1748. The compulsions of building a solid and viable regional state were manifest most of all in continuing pressure exerted by the Murshidabad regime on Bengal's zamindars

Many zamindars, including the rajas of Nadia, were not exempt from these pressures, which, in practical terms, translated into practices of draconian severity and bestial torture.<sup>293</sup> Several of the rajas of Nadia- Maharaja Krishna Chandra Roy, the patron of the *Annada Mangal Kabya* among them- had been brutalized and humiliated several times by the ruling regime on charges of failing to meet the nawabs' revenue demands. Naturally, this was a massive insult to the prestige and standing of the rajas of Nadia, who possessed one of the larger zamindaris in western Bengal, and to their self-proclaimed posture as the leaders of Brahmanical society in Bengal. The *Annada Mangal Kabya*, composed at the behest of Maharaja Krishna Chandra by his court poet, the son of a recently dispossessed landed family, can perhaps be seen as a narrative that sought to function as a response to the political and cultural crises affecting the raja.<sup>294</sup>

Though the practice of harsh brutality by the Murshidabad nawabs toward zamindars who were revenue defaulters is true, the implicit and explicit view upheld in most of the existing literature about the distant and cold relations (amounting almost to alienation) between the nawabs and the bulk of Zamindars in Bengal may not be entirely valid. Despite revenue pressures and indignities suffered at the hands of the *niabat*, there may have never been a total rupture in relations between the two. According to the Sanskrit genealogy of the rajas of Nadia, entitled the *Kshitish*

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<sup>293</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, p. 410.

<sup>294</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, 'The Persianization of "Itihasa": Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bengal', p. 532.

*Vamsavalicharitam* and composed probably in the earlier part of the eighteenth century, even these rajas, no strangers to rough treatment at the nawab's hands, recounted with pride the instances of friendship and honour showed to them by the nawab.<sup>295</sup>

During the troubled times of the *Bargi* invasions, some zamindars reportedly withheld military assistance to Ali Vardi Khan; but others-the raja of Bansberia, for example- offered spirited resistance to the *Bargis*. In fact, the oft-cited formulation of the Calkins thesis, the Murshidabad nawabs, made deliberate efforts to establish a firm base of support for their rule by forging a triangular relationship with zamindars, military aristocracy, and bankers,<sup>296</sup> is correct overall. Calkins's formulation, however, completely overlooks the Murshidabad *niabafs* practice of reaching out to an extensive range of middle-level, literate gentry's families, many of whom benefited handsomely from their association with various levels of the nawabi government.<sup>297</sup> Some among such gentry also took an active part in defence of the realm against the marauding *Bargis*. There is no direct evidence to suggest that Gangaram, the author of the *Maharashtra Purana*, composed it at the behest of the nawab or that his intention in authoring it was to "whitewash" the nawab and the nawabi government. But, on the other hand, it is indeed the case that persons of the social/professional background of Gangaram benefited from nawabi rule. Also, professional, educated persons like Gangaram and others approached the Murshidabad *darbar* for purposes of career advancement, as well as for the support of scholarly/poetic careers.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid. p. 533.

<sup>296</sup> Philip B. Calkins, 'The Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal, 1700-1740', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1970, p. 805.

<sup>297</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, 'The Persianization of "Itihasa": Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bengal', p. 533.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

Another factor that helps us to historicize and contextualize the newer idioms, the currency of a Persianised Mughal political culture in Bengal. The slow diffusion of Islam and Islamicate culture in Bengal over several centuries had already introduced some aspects into the cultural life of Bengal: the crystallization of cults of worship around composite new deities such as *Satya Pir/Satyanarayan*, the emergence of a cluster of Pir or Ghazi Mang-is (narratives centred around the miraculous powers of pirs), the growing use of Persian and Hindusthani words in Bengali literary texts, and the development of a genre of love stories following the precedent of North Indian *dastans* and *qissahs*. But closer integration into the Mughal imperial system and, more particularly, the emergence of a regional nawabi that asserted its autonomy and yet attempted to preserve and further refine Mughal governmental institutions served to strengthen the diffusion of Persianised/Mughal (rather than merely Islamicate) political culture in Bengal during the eighteenth century. I have argued elsewhere that the Murshidabad regime and its ruling class sought deliberately to represent themselves as the heirs to a Mughal political culture that they kept alive and further refined.<sup>299</sup>

A Persianised political culture had held sway in courtly and elite circles of what is described as the "Eastern Islamic world" for many centuries. Associated with the use of the Persian language and literary culture in elite, courtly society, as well as with certain modes of deportment, aesthetic tastes, and styles of governance,<sup>300</sup> it had come to represent, as Subrahmanyam terms it, "a yardstick and a measure of civilization."<sup>301</sup> It represented what Marshall G. M. Hodgson

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid. pp. 534-35.

<sup>300</sup> Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London: Faber and Faber, 1991, p. 48

<sup>301</sup> Tony K. Stewart, trans. *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 78.

famously described as an aspect of Islamicate civilization that was associated with, but nevertheless distinct and separable from, the Islamic religion.<sup>302</sup>

A Persianised political culture had certainly become an attribute of the Mughal imperium, as it was also an attribute of the Delhi sultanate and regional sultanates in the Deccan and elsewhere within the Indian subcontinent. As Muzaffar Alam's work shows, the Mughal Empire went much further than previous regimes within India in promoting the diffusion and strengthening of a Persianised political culture to different parts of the empire.<sup>303</sup> The adoption of Persian as the language of administration probably played the most potent role in the transmission of a Persianised political culture among the various regions of the Mughal polity. The use of the Persian language for official, governmental purposes was known in Bengal during the reigns of its pre-Mughal, Muslim sultans (twelfth to late sixteenth centuries).<sup>304</sup> But a stronger and much more vigorous Persianised culture associated primarily with the Mughal imperial system and its political traditions gained currency there particularly during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.<sup>305</sup>

A Mughal/Persianised courtly culture in Bengal was evident in lifestyles, modes of attire, and literary tastes, particularly among the military and administrative elites and other darbar-oriented people during this period. Some of these features spilled over into those segments of gentry's society that were associated with governmental and political circles.<sup>306</sup> Other features such as the impact of Persian administrative vocabularies, such as the terms *subah*, *pargana*,

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<sup>302</sup> Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Vol. 1, The Classical Age of Islam, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974, pp. 1, 59.

<sup>303</sup> Kumkum Chatterjee, 'The Persianization of "Itihasa": Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bengal', p. 535.

<sup>304</sup> M. R. Tarafdar, *Husain Shahi Bengal, 1494-1538 A.D.: A Socio political Study*, pp. 264-66.

<sup>305</sup> Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, pp. 223-24.

<sup>306</sup> Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, New Delhi: Rupa and Co., 1926, pp. 201-08.

*bakshi*, and *hasil*-became even more widespread in this region through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>307</sup> But the one factor that played an especially potent role in the dissemination of Mughal political culture was the Persian language and, related to it, Persianised intellectual culture.

The Bengali territorial nobility and gentry of the Mughal and *nawabi* periods embraced a Persianised culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in particular because it provided them an affiliation with the most prestigious imperial tradition currently prevailing in the subcontinent. Possibly, the single most important manifestation of this trend was seen in the proliferation of the Persian language and Persianised education among them. Many among the literate gentry and zamindari class embraced education that involved familiarity with and fluency in Persian, Hindusthani/Nagri, Oriya, and Bengali (often in addition to Sanskrit),<sup>308</sup> in part because it provided access to jobs in the bureaucracy. Bharatchandra Roy received formal training in Persian, as did many other persons of middle-class gentry backgrounds during this period. Persian literacy became especially common among Bengali *Kayasthas* and *Baidyas* (these two *jatis* were mainly associated with scribal, clerical jobs, and other literate occupations, such as the practice of medicine, since at least the medieval period in Bengal) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The extent of it is proven by the fact that in his biography of Raja Pratapaditya, which was published by Fort William College in 1801, Ramram Basu describes Persian proficiency as the *jativyavasa* (hereditary occupation) of *Kayasthas*.<sup>309</sup> Bengali Brahmins, too, were participants

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid. pp. 201-08.

<sup>308</sup> Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, Vol. 2, Calcutta: Ananda, 1405 BS, p.155; Kumkum Chatterjee, 'The Persianization of "Itihasa": Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Culture in Eighteenth-Century Bengal' p. 536.

<sup>309</sup> Ram Basu, *Maharaja Pratapaditya Charitra*, Searampore: Mission Press, 1801, p. 5; Kumkum

in this Persianised culture. In the late sixteenth century, Jayananda, the author of the *Chaitanya Mangal*, recorded his outrage and disapproval of the fact that Brahmins had taken to wearing socks, familiarizing themselves with the use of weaponry such as the cannon, and were reading Persian *masnavis*.<sup>310</sup> Many other instances of Persian proficiency among Brahmins can be found during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The same period witnessed the proliferation of schools in which Persian was taught to boys of respectable gentry families. Very often, local Zamindars maintained such schools and were found to be primarily clustered in areas with heavy concentrations of gentry's families.<sup>311</sup> The currency of Persian had become so common among the gentry and territorial magnate class of Mughal and nawabi Bengal that teachers of Persian were often Hindus, usually *Baidyas* and *Kayasthas*. Bharatchandra Roy, the author of the *Annada Mangal Kabya* discussed here, received training in Persian from an instructor named Ramchandra Munshi.<sup>312</sup>

But the acquisition of Persian was not confined to utilitarian reasons alone. Persianisation had come to be associated with intellectual and cultural refinement and sophistication. By the early part of the eighteenth century, certain types of narratives related to the courts of landed magnates (e.g., the Sanskrit *Kshitish Vamsavaliharitam*) were referring to Persian as a *shastra* (*para sikashastram*), that is, not merely a utilitarian tool that was necessary to maintain revenue accounts and other items of public record but a formal, intellectual discipline. Mastery of this discipline was also deemed to be one of the essential attributes of a Hindu raja. Hindu zamindars of the eighteenth

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Chatterjee, op. cit.

<sup>310</sup> Jayananda, *Chaitanyamangal*, ed., Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya and Sumangal Rana, Santiniketan: Viswa-bharati Gabeshana Prakashan Bibhag, 1994, p. 135.

<sup>311</sup> Ram Basu, op-cit. p. 46; Kumkum Chatterjee, op-cit., p. 536.

<sup>312</sup> Brojendranath Bandyopadhyaya and Sajanikanta Das, eds. *Bharatchandra Granthabali*, Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1369 B.S, p. 25; Kumkum Chatterjee, op-cit. p. 536.

century sought to convince their subjects of their cultural and intellectual refinement by stressing their achievements in appreciating and composing Persian and Hindusthani poetry, skills in Persian calligraphy, and so on. Although not easy to document, there are also scattered references in late nineteenth-century Bengali sources about the existence of Persian biographies and chronicles of prominent rajas of the two earlier centuries and possibly a period preceding that. Ramram Basu refers explicitly to Persian accounts of Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore; there also existed a Persian biography of Raja Rajballabh, one of the most eminent noblemen of mid-eighteenth-century Bengal.<sup>313</sup> Libraries maintained in the palaces and mansions of Bengal's elites were also stocked with Persian literature. The library in the Calcutta mansion of Maharaja Nabakrishna Deb was reputed to have a large and impressive collection of Persian books.<sup>314</sup> The library of the nawabs of Murshidabad contained copies of very many classics of Indo-Persian literature, including a copy of the *Timurnama*, which had been copied in 1000 *Hijri*, and two volumes of the *Akbarnamah* in the handwriting of the great Abul Fazl himself.<sup>315</sup> The most typical image of Bengal's territorial aristocracy depicted in later literature is bitter hostility toward the Mughals. Yet as Basu's biography of Raja Pratapaditya shows, they were not necessarily enemies of the Persianized culture that had come to be associated with the political elites who formed part of Mughal courtly society, both at the imperial capital in Delhi and in the regional courts in the provinces.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Ram Basu, op.cit. pp. 3-4; Kumkum Chatterjee, op-cit. p. 537.

<sup>314</sup> Alope Roy, "Paribarik Pustak Samgraha" [Book Collections of families], Ababhash, October-December, 2003, 110-11; Kumkum Chatterjee, op-cit. p. 537.

<sup>315</sup> Purnachandra Majumdar, *The Musnud of Murshidabad (1704-1904 : ) Being a Synopsis of the history of Murshidabad for the last two centuries, to which are appended notes of places and Objects of interest at Murshidabad*, Murshidabad: Saroda Ray, pp. 80-89; Kumkum Chatterjee, op. cit., p. 537.

<sup>316</sup> Ram Basu, op-cit., pp. 61-63; Kumkum Chatterjee, op-cit. p. 537.

The central issues in both the *Annada Mangal* and the *Maharashtra Purana* revolve around questions of virtue, sin, and the necessity of forging a mode of ethical conduct among all types of people- but particularly among local lords and the various hierarchical layers of political authority positioned above them. The specific issues that are highlighted in the *Annada Mangal* and the *Maharashtra Purana*- that is, the moral and political consequences of disloyalty to overlords, the gravity of failing to discharge revenue and tribute obligations, and the importance of rewarding political loyalty through duly authorised offices, titles, and material perquisites- are articulated in these narratives through the idiom of a Persianised Mughal political culture.

An equally significant dimension was constituted by their conscious display of loyalty to and adherence to Brahmanical-Sanskritic traditions. Therefore, it is important not to exaggerate the Persianisation of political culture in Bengal but to see it in perspective.

### **Conclusion:**

This chapter concludes that a tradition of cultural tolerance and interreligious harmony prevailed throughout the Mughal rule in Medieval Bengal. The social attachment was the priority of the rulers. Every individual was considered as an equal citizen of the society irrespective of their religious or ethnic identities. The Bengal Sultans and Mughals in the medieval period applied liberal and helpful strategies toward the non-Muslims in Bengal. The rulers significantly contributed to the progress of religious literature of non-Muslims and did not prevent them from propagating their religion. They also patronised the institutions of all faiths. Although very few examples of religious intolerance can be found, it cannot be generalised that medieval Muslim rulers were intolerant of non-Muslims or were unjust to them as the major part of them showed equal behaviour of Muslims and non-Muslims in every aspect of their life. Again, the Muslim Sufis played a valuable role in mitigating hatred and establishing peace among the citizen of



Bengal, irrespective of their religion. They promoted liberal, syncretic, and accommodative views in attracting non-Muslims to Islam. Their simple life and humanitarian activities impressed people of all faiths and helped establish interreligious harmony in Mughal Bengal. So, it can be assumed that if the examples of medieval Muslim rulers and Sufi saints are properly followed today, religious antagonism and hatred will be mitigated, and a real environment of interreligious harmony will be established.

The study of Mughal Bengal towns and urban centers shows that the urban process was in full swing before the arrival of foreign companies in Bengal. The Mughal dynasty gathered the support of the local corporate structure and gave it away to the foreign merchant after reducing the import duties. The emperors, nobility, and service gentry bonded with devotional networks, artisans, and labourers. The towns will be seen as places to store and transact information and ideas of hard-edge economic classes and inclusive communities. The relationship created by the indigenous notion of arbitration, by property rights by criminal and civil laws made the idea of the city blurred in Hindustan from bleeding politics to social history, urban history gave a fresh look to Indian towns and bazaars. It traces the answers to many questions in Indian history, such as the origin of communalism, poverty, nationalism, and maybe the role of towns and cities in the decline of the empire.

## Conclusion

The present dissertation argues that growth of towns and urban centres in Bengal received a new impetus when the province was integrated into the Mughal Empire. Various factors led to the growth of new towns and urban centres. The phenomenal expansion and augmentation of trade both in volume and value at all levels specifically the overseas trade radiating through European, Persian and other foreign sea-ports to Coromandel and Gujarat, and finally to Chittagong, Satgaon, Hugli, Balasore and Patna involving dominantly the Portuguese, the Dutch, the English and some other foreign trading agencies and even private merchants played determining role in bringing prosperity and wealth to the province and commercial dynamism which certainly paved the way for rise of new towns and urban centres. The vast increase in the companies' export trade from Bengal reasonably transformed and reshaped the structure and organisation of overall trade mechanism in that region. Chapter 1 of the dissertation titling 'Overseas, Inter-regional and Local Trade in Mughal Bengal' has stressed that Bengal's legendary richness and wealth, availability of all kinds of wares and grains and cheapness of prices in the medieval period was well known in India and abroad, the advent of European companies accelerated Bengal's maritime trade along with the local and regional mercantile. The hierarchy and structure of the markets like *gola*, *katra*, *ganj* and *haat* established throughout the province of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa well reflected the dynamism of the *bazaar* and market-structure. Mughal subahdars and later nawabs of Bengal gave patronage and support to the function of the market-structure. Both production centres of cotton and silk textiles, rice, sugar, opium, saltpetre and other items and their supply to the markets located in the big towns were well connected through both waterways and roadways.

There was a clear distinction between the urban centres and the major towns in the minds of medieval chroniclers. *Shahr* (Persian)/*balda* (Arabic) meant major town. *Bahar -i- Ajam* mentions *shahr* having lofty buildings with huge pleasure gardens. The capital towns were addressed as *dar-ul khilafat*, and *Bandar* was a port town, while *qasba* as defined by Khwaja Yasin, was a large village known by the pargana. Thus *qasba* was an urban centre; a township with a rural-urban solid interface. A newly established centre generally had an epithet, while *pura* denoted a *mandi* or a suburb. Thus the connotation of early medieval *pura* implying a *nagara* got transformed in the medieval period, and particular new vocabulary gained currency, so also the nature of the cityscape.

Markets were related to the availability and size of a surplus, where trade could have been carried out freely. There is an empirical evidence to support the notion that all other things being equal, the number of markets is inversely proportional to the rate of state intervention by means of taxation in kind. In the late eighteenth century, the Nazims invested directly in markets to ratchet their rental income. Involvement of royal power in commercial pursuits had become a feature of the eighteenth century. The indigenous states ensured that the markets remained rationally organised. On the other hand, the Company state's distorting effects had yet to affect late-eighteenth-century markets generally.

This research has argued that the towns and urban centres that emerged in Mughal Bengal were chiefly founded and flourished on the basis of economic factors. Commercial growth of a town, rise of the market and specifically appearance of hub area in the towns resulted in establishing a mint and thus it's emerging as a mint city. Several mints were started in the province during the Mughal period. Dhaka, Chittagonng, Rajmahal/Akbarnagar, Hugli, Satgaon,

Murshidabad, Balasore and Patna/Azimabad were prominent among them. Mughal policy of mint-farming was certainly an added benefit as it ensured regular flow of currency in the market both for Indian and overseas merchants.

Chapter 2 titled ‘Rise of New Urban Centres and Some Major Towns in Mughal Bengal’ has asserted that not much work has been done on the subject of urbanization especially during Sultanate and Mughal period. The most recent work in this connection is of Aniruddha Ray’s *Towns and Cities of Medieval India: A Brief Survey* (2017). We have attempted to establish that a growing economy with three-tier trade at overseas level along with inter-regional and local was certainly the most strong characteristic and parameter for the rise of new cities, towns and urban centres. But other criteria like the growth of pilgrimage centre for *Sufi khanqahs*, shrines or temples and the immigration of people of various sorts and categories such as *ulema*, poets, artisans, workers, soldiers and officials also played important role for the rise of urban centres. Settlement of merchants whether permanently or temporarily was also a formidable reason for the emergence and growth of a city. Indian, foreign merchants, traders and bankers-Mughals, Pathans, Europeans, Armenians, Turanis, Marwaris and other up-country Hindus were attracted to Dhaka, Murshidabad, Qasimbazar, Patna and some other major towns which apart from having been the centres of production of certain specific items of trade like silk and calicoes, sugar and saltpetre. These large cities were the centres of trade and commerce and at the same time they served the purpose of administrative headquarters and military garrison. Hierarchy of Urban Settlements like *Mauza*, *Qasba*, *baldah* and *Shahr* well denoted the gradual rise and growth of the towns. Discussion of some individual towns and cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajmahal, Malda, Hugli, Kasimbazar, Chandannagar, Chinsura, Balasore and Patna have established the commercial dynamism, territorial expansion, population growth and provision of better transport and communication of these towns and cities.

Migration of Muslims, khattris, Marwaris and some other sects to Mughal Bengal, growth of Pirism/Sufism and religious syncretism, spread of Vaishnavism, changes in Muslim society and the emergence of *Ashraf* and *Ajlaf* groups, rise of a new set of architecture and new food culture are some of the points which determined the nuances of socio-cultural transformation in Mughal Bengal. These points are well elaborated in Chapter-3 that is the last chapter of the present dissertation. One cannot deny the fact that Mughal Bengal witnessed the working of new forces that entirely transformed Bengali life and thought and the influence of that transformation is still felt in the province. During this period, the outer world came to Bengal and Bengal went out to the external world. The social, economic, and cultural transformation that took place during this period had a distinct influence on the evolution of modern Bengal later.

The moral reformation of the upper and middle classes has been the work of Vaishnavism in uplifting the lower ranks of society and the illiterate masses by carrying religion to their doors through the device of *Nam-sankirtan* or chanting processions- which is spoken of as the unique contribution of Chaitanya to the spiritual life of the modern age. On the other hand, the Muslim Sufis played a valuable role in mitigating hatred and establishing certain degree of peace in the region. We may conclude that a tradition of cultural tolerance and inter-religious harmony prevailed throughout the Mughal rule in Bengal.

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